

EPISCOPAL DIVINITY SCHOOL

Thesis

VIRIDITAS, A READING IN RETREAT:  
TEACHING HOLISTIC SPIRITUALITY THROUGH SYMBOLS  
FOUND IN THE WRITINGS OF HILDEGARD OF BINGEN

BY

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MDiv, The Episcopal Divinity School, 2006

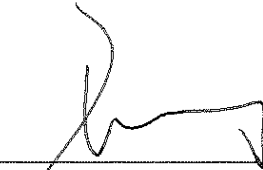
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2013

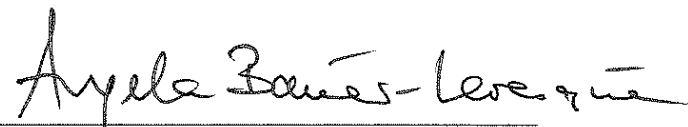
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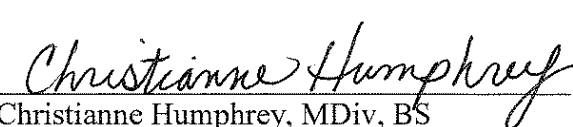
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## Acknowledgements

This thesis stands at the intersection of theology, psychology, pastoral care, medieval studies, the arts, and teaching. Since this thesis continues the work begun in my Master's Thesis, I continue to be thankful to all guidance propelled me through that process. You provided me with a foundation on which to build. As I turned to the practical application and reflection on my ministry, others have helped me in that process. First I would like to thank Dr. Beverly Mayne Kienzle of Harvard Divinity School for her continued support of my efforts. She gave generously of her time, knowledge, and interest. Without her, this thesis would still be a dream. I would like to thank my thesis advisor, the Rev. Dr. Patrick Cheng, for his clarity of purpose and his ability to help me find the narrative flow. I thank the Rev. Doctor David Hamilton, whose wisdom encompasses both the theory and the practice of pastoral care to those in crisis, and who led me to many a scholarly and practical resource. Also, I deeply thank the Rev. Joan Martin, whose faith in me was a spiritual support; I leaned on the knowledge of that support. My friend, Dr. David Baker, Esq., provided me warm hospitality at a moments notice. I continue to be thankful for my sister Marilyn, research librarian extraordinaire, who has now passed through the gates of death into eternal life with Christ. Thank you all for your generosity of spirit. And I especially rejoice in thanksgiving for *mio caro sposo*, Stephen Whiteley, who placed many a hot meal by me as I typed away, edited and proof-read, and who encouraged me in this whole complicated endeavor. Whatever is good in this opus I owe to these *amici*, whatever is amiss is my own responsibility.

## **Introduction**

As I gaze out my window I see a lush garden set in a northern forest in Vermont. I hear the chatter of the trout brook, swollen by recent rain, always fed by natural springs, and seasonally fed by snow melt. The hillsides are covered with white, magenta, or pink roses, pink sturdy spirea, upright purple Japanese iris, daylilies of peach, mahogany, or cream, a globe thistle the size of a small tree, covered with bumble bees, and, towering over the rest, pink fluffy blossoms of Queen of the Prairie rue. The pink turtleheads are recovering nicely from being grazed upon by deer, hopefully in time for their late summer bloom. Birch, elm, maple, and pine are a few of the tree species that encircle the gardens. Much of what I see my husband and I have planted with much sweat and toil over that last fifteen years of our residency, much was planted by the hand of nature, some by former residents. The soil is paper-thin in this young valley, young because it was formed by one of the last glaciers to let go. Any deep soil is evidence of vegetable gardens painstakingly developed by the sheep farmers who settled this steep valley, and those who followed, doing their best to survive in this beautiful but difficult terrain. I gaze out and see a complex universe, one where the fisher must go after the fawn, both beautiful creations. In this complex universe, I both experience wholesomeness in working the soil and eating fresh vegetables, and I must wage an unrelenting battle with slugs, give up plants to deer and berries to birds. Nature, in which we humans live and of which we are a part, contains both/and.

This both/and equation arises naturally as I engage in my own spiritual journey and in my ministry. One of the most compelling questions I address is “How do I support a healthy spirituality, one that is both open to the wondrous gifts of God, and true to the complex and unsafe world in which we live?” Both/and. As a mental health chaplain, I have been with patients who struggle to hold both their inner conviction that God loves them, and the knowledge of the evil visited upon them, often by their own parents or relatives, those who “should have” protected them. I have been with other hospital patients who both feel at one with the universe when they are fishing or hunting, and who are suffering from a disease which is also part of nature. I have counseled people who have been both spiritually abused by organized religion, and who still have a thirst for spiritual things. Both/and. The both/and equation speaks to the fullness of our experiences as humans, and it provides us a way to think and talk about ambiguities and complexities.

In all of this, I find wholesomeness and healing in the wisdom of Hildegard of Bingen, a 12th century mystic, monastic, founder, prophet, poet, composer, educator, and scientist. In 1998, I attended *The Greenest Branch*,<sup>1</sup> a conference on Hildegard of Bingen, three days of lectures, music, and art. The event concluded with a service in St. Michael’s Chapel, a Roman Catholic chapel.<sup>2</sup> The chapel was described to me by one of

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<sup>1</sup> The conference was co-sponsored by the University of Vermont, Trinity College, and St. Michael’s College, Burlington, Vermont I have no access to the final symposium program. Preliminary list of events: <http://web.archive.org/web/19980122035330/http://www.trinityvt.edu/hildegard/schedule.htm>. List of participating scholars and musicians: <http://web.archive.org/web/19980122041728/http://www.trinityvt.edu/hildegard/scholars.htm>. Note: *Anonymous 4* were there, and well as *Anima*, Vermont’s own women’s group that specialized in Hildegard’s music.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 6: *The Greenest Branch* Liturgical Celebration Bulletin.

the resident liturgical dancers as a “male dominated space.” Into this space came banners from Hildegard’s illuminations, a herb-scented water ritual, women’s voices speaking Hildegard’s words from the lectern and pulpit, women dancing liturgical dance, women’s voices singing Hildegard’s poetry and music. In later conversations, I was able to discuss the impact of the service with several who had attended. Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, scholars, potters, and liturgical dancers, men and women, young and old, all witnessed that they had experienced that service as liberative. They spoke of the liberative power of hearing women’s voices as voices of authority, seeing the embodied movement and rhythm in liturgical dance, smelling the fragrances of the herbs, and feeling the freshness of the water. Years later, they still talk about the power of that experience and how it has affected their life for healing, wisdom, and wholesomeness.

What is it in the compositions of this 12<sup>th</sup> century nun that translates to effective pastoral care in our time, as that service obviously did?<sup>3</sup> I have identified three aspects of her compositions<sup>4</sup> that can especially support healthy spirituality: Hildegard teaches a creation-affirming theology;<sup>5</sup> she masterfully uses holistic symbols;<sup>6</sup> she teaches a positive, relationship-based moral theology.<sup>7</sup> I have found both her teachings and her

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<sup>3</sup> Liturgy, as a form of aesthetic theology, can give pastoral care to those who participate in its materially mediated healing theology. (See page 50.) In this case, they experienced liturgy as liberative.

<sup>4</sup> Compose: to create by mental or artistic labor. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed., s.v. “compose.” I use the word “composition” when referring to all of the various types of Hildegard’s works since they include works in many different genres, not just musical compositions. All definitions of words in English are from this dictionary.

<sup>5</sup> Heinrich Schipperges, *Hildegard of Bingen: Healing and the Nature of the Cosmos*, trans. by John A. Broadwin (Princeton, NJ: Markus Weiner Publishers, 1997), 37.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Fox, *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Bear and Company, 1985), 16, 19.

<sup>7</sup> Fox, *Illuminations*, 18-19.



symbols, one within the other, to be effective in supporting real and healthy spiritual growth, both in myself and in others.

### *Proposed Reading in Retreat*

So that I may share these, I propose a “Reading in Retreat,” a three day retreat based on one of Hildegard’s most holistic symbols- *viriditas*, greenness, the effective presence and working of the Holy Spirit in creation and in our spiritual lives.<sup>8</sup>

*Viriditas* belongs to a group of symbols (a symbol cluster) that evoke wholeness and salvation. The retreat explores the symbol itself, how Hildegard uses this symbol, and how it supports a healthy spirituality. By focusing on a particular symbol, we can learn not only about that symbol but also highlight how symbols surround and influence us, whether or not we are conscious of them.<sup>9</sup> In doing so, we explore the value of consciously using symbols in our own work of spiritual care.

The “method” of the retreat, engaging symbolic language, is also its subject matter. “Reading” will be both a contemplative reading of her words and also “reading” art, music, and nature. The inspiration for this type of retreat was an academic retreat, based on the *Reading in Retreat: Early Cistercian Spirituality* course taught by Professor Mark Burrows.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of this thesis is to structure such a retreat.

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<sup>8</sup> Symbols: something that stands for or suggests something else by reason of relationship, association, convention, or accidental resemblance; a visible sign of something invisible; an object or act representing something in the unconscious mind that has been repressed. Metaphors and paradigms are types of symbols.

<sup>9</sup> James Geary, *I Is An Other: the Secret Life of Metaphor and How It Shapes the Way We See the World* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2012), 65.

<sup>10</sup> The course was offered by Andover Newton Theological School and held at Our Lady of Glastonbury Abbey, Hingham, MA, on Jan. 7-12, 2007.

### *My social location*

I am a white middle class woman in her sixties, engaged in parish ministry, pastoral counseling, gardening, and teaching private music lessons in Vermont. I am intrigued by the fact that Hildegard engaged with so many things that also interest me—poetry, mysticism, music, the dedicated life, the natural order. As a young woman I was a member of the Community of the Holy Spirit, a women’s monastic community in the Episcopal Church, teaching music at St. Hilda’s and St. Hugh’s School, NYC. I am a harpist and singer, a specialist in Celtic music and Gregorian chant. Over the years many people have trusted me with spiritual counsel, and I am trained as a mental health chaplain. For my personal spiritual journey, Hildegard was an affirmation of the value of the mystical experience as doorway into existential wisdom, an affirmation that mystical spirituality was not an escape from materiality, but a way to integrate profoundly the material with the spiritual. I have found that this message resonates with others on their spiritual journey, and gives them wisdom and support for their own experiences and insights. Not least, it gives people who have had some form of mystical experience an assurance that speaking with me about their experience is safe and possibly helpful.<sup>11</sup>

As a chaplain on the psych wards I sat in on the Grief and Anger Group Sessions.<sup>12</sup> In a session there is first a learning component, usually with graphs, teaching

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<sup>11</sup> While this has happened several times, I do not have their permission to share their stories.

<sup>12</sup> Grief and Anger Groups are a form of Group Therapy. “Group therapy: any psychotherapeutic process in which a group of individuals meets with a therapist/leader. The interactions among the members of the group are assumed to be therapeutic and in many cases to be more effective than the traditional client-therapist dyad.” Arthur S. Reber, Rhiannon Allen, and Emily S. Reber, eds., *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*, 2009, s.v. group therapy, [http://proxy.eds.edu:2048/login?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.credoreference.com/entry/penguinpsyc/group\\_therapy](http://proxy.eds.edu:2048/login?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.credoreference.com/entry/penguinpsyc/group_therapy) (accessed April 29, 2013).

about emotions, naming them and showing how they relate to each other and describing what they feel like. The message affirms the client's emotions as truth-tellers and affirms the need to identify the emotions and face into the causes of those emotions. The floor is then open for the clients to ask questions, find their voice, and tell their story. When I was a mental health chaplain I saw firsthand how important- and difficult- this work is. Some of my most fruitful conversations with patients followed the work done in Grief and Anger Group. Much of what enkindles my passion for healthy spirituality comes from these experiences.

### *Healthy and Unhealthy Spiritualities*

In my life and ministry I have witnessed both healthy and unhealthy spiritualities. Judging what is spiritually healthy is, of course, highly subjective and value-laden. I speak from my experience as a chaplain and counselor, from my ecofeminist world-view, and as a Christian. From that experience, I believe that a healthy spirituality is one that is holistic and anti-oppressive, that is, in "right relationship" with oneself, fellow humans, the cosmos, and with God who is Love;<sup>13</sup> unhealthy spiritualities are those that alienate, including alienation from one's own self, from others, or from nature.

### *The Structure of the Thesis*

Chapter 1 distinguishes between healthy and unhealthy spiritualities and why it matters. Chapter 2 sets the groundwork for analyzing Hildegard's symbol, *viriditas*, by placing Hildegard in her historic, monastic, and cultural context; discusses current

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<sup>13</sup> 1 John 4:16b "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." From my experience in pastoral care, I believe that conceptualizing "God is love" or "God is loving" is helpful to building the level of trust in God needed for healthy spirituality. All translations of passages from the Bible are from the Revised Standard Version, except those passages found in Sermon 26, Appendix 3 which is my translation from the Latin.

interest in her and her work and explores the bridges between the issues of her day and ours; and examines symbols themselves and how symbols work in the psyche. Chapter 3 centers on the symbol *viriditas* and how this symbol addresses the unhealthy spiritualities as described in Chapter 1. Chapter 4 treats the various aspects of structuring, logistics, and giving the retreat. Chapter 5 is a self-reflection considering what I have learned through the process of preparing the thesis, including a critique of the thesis and ideas for further work. My translation of one sermon that uses *viriditas* in the narrative, the retreat illuminations, and a plan for the retreat are included in the appendices.

Hildegard's symbols are of a complex cosmos which is both the expression of a loving Creator, in which the spirit and the material interweave, and the place of betrayal, death, suffering and evil. Both/and. Her symbols are an opportunity for honest wrestling with theological and moral issues, issues which have not gone away in the ensuing centuries, but are still found today. It is my hope that through this study others may claim a vocabulary of symbols that is wholesome, one that overrides alienating vocabularies, symbols which safely open us to praise God and to live righteously.

## Chapter 1

### Healthy Spirituality

*The soul that is full of wisdom is saturated  
with the spray of a bubbling fountain – God himself.*<sup>14</sup>

This chapter will identify several marks of healthy spirituality and unhealthy spirituality. As a mental health chaplain and a specialist in spirituality, I am concerned that people have access to a spirituality that is healthy for them, healthy for the earth, healthy in community with all other beings. One becomes aware of healthy spirituality when one witnesses the flourishing of the soul. One also becomes aware of an unhealthy spirituality when one witnesses its devastating effects.

It is also important to distinguish between the distress caused by an unhealthy spirituality and the distress of a person in a transitional stage during spiritual growth. A complete discussion of that issue is outside the scope of this thesis. In counseling anyone, it is important to discern the cause of distress. In this chapter I describe some causes of distress that are not due to transitional stages, but ongoing, underlying root causes of spiritual distress.

There are five unhealthy spiritualities that I have encountered in my pastoral care.<sup>15</sup> 1.) *Alienation from self*: caused by a patriarchal theology that “others” women

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<sup>14</sup> Gabriele Uhlein, OSF, intro. and trans., *Meditations with Hildegard of Bingen*, (Rochester, VT: Bear & Company, 1983), 63. Cf. Hildegard of Bingen, *Hildegard of Bingen's Book of Divine Works with Letters and Songs*, abridged, trans. Robert Cunningham, ed. and intro. Matthew Fox (Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Company, 1987), VIII. 2. 8. Hereafter *BDW*. For the actual Book of Divine Works, the numbers refer to the Vision, the section, and the paragraph. Letters and songs are cited with page numbers. Cf. Psalm 36, “For with you is the fountain of life; and in your light we see light.”

<sup>15</sup> There are, of course, other unhealthy spiritualities, other alienations. These are the five with which I have had most experience.

and other target groups,<sup>16</sup> making them contingent and their experiences invisible, leading to centerlessness. 2.) *Alienation of authority*: caused by a theology that gives patriarchal power-over to leaders, and disempowers the rest of the community. 3.) *Alienation from materiality*: caused by a dualistic theology that sets spirit against materiality and privileges humanity over the rest of creation. 4.) *Alienation from empathy either for oneself or for others*: caused by a theology that either denies sin and suffering, or teaches that suffering itself is good. 5.) *Alienation from others*: a theology that focuses exclusively on the individual's relationship with God and that does not acknowledge the social, communal, or ecological dimensions of sin and salvation.

It is the spiritual dimensions of these alienations that I seek to address, but it is important to acknowledge that these alienations are embedded in the complex cultural/psychological matrix in which we live. It is also important to understand that *context* is an important element in distinguishing a healthy spirituality from an unhealthy spirituality. For example: I believe it is oppressive of me to *require* of another person that they accept their suffering as a way to be closer to God; it *may be* liberative for another person to accept their suffering as a way to be closer to God. Also, healthy spiritualities can come out of very emotionally unhealthy situations, and unhealthy spiritualities can be the normative spirituality in otherwise emotionally healthy situations. Emotional, physical, and spiritual health *can* be related, but not necessarily so. For example: an abuser usually has suffered abuse, but not everyone who has suffered abuse

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<sup>16</sup> Target and non-target groups are categories used by anti-oppression teaching and analysis to reveal the groups that are considered either targets of discrimination and oppression, or “normative” non-targets of privilege. The analysis also reveals the interlocking oppressions and multiple identities. See: William M. Kondrath, *God's Tapestry: Understanding and Celebrating Differences* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2008), 44-45.

becomes an abuser. Equally, economically advantaged, well-adjusted people may lack empathy for those in penury or in mental distress.

Because two of the alienations flow from the hierarchical patriarchal paradigm, I will describe that first before discussing the unhealthy spiritualities themselves.

### ***Paradigmatic Patriarchal Hierarchy as Foundational Alienation***

The patriarchal hierarchy paradigm has been the normative narrative in Western culture for millennia.<sup>17</sup> The paradigm genders the participants in the culture, privileging the masculine.<sup>18</sup> As a result of this long history, spiritual practices have tended to emphasize the masculine gifts and traits men develop within their culture. A well-defined ego is the clear goal of male self-construction.<sup>19</sup> There is great wisdom in traditional teachings that enable a boy to grow into mature manhood, to grow into spiritual maturity. It becomes problematic when those traits considered “masculine” are exclusively honored and developed, with what are described as “feminine” traits belittled and not developed.<sup>20</sup> Privileging “masculine” traits at the expense of “feminine” raises several issues: the whole person is not developed in this ego-construction, especially when emotions are

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<sup>17</sup> Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 39. Language use is tricky here because the word “hierarchy” can mean something thought to be ontological (“Ideal” in the Platonic sense) or it can merely describe how humans chose to organize an organization. Here I am using it in the ontological sense. Later I will use it in the mundane sense.

<sup>18</sup> Rosemarie Putnam Tong, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 138.

<sup>19</sup> While this is culturally true, there are families and environments where the boy receives conflicting messages. It is also important not to confuse the sin of pride with the positive value pride, nor confuse “ego”- Freud’s word for a self-aware “self”- with self-centered ego. The misuse and confusion between words has caused much confusion, bad spiritual care, and unjustified guilt-feelings in males and females.

<sup>20</sup> This assumes that traits can be masculine or feminine. The cultural privileging of masculine traits is a reflection of Western cultures’ paradigm of hierarchical patriarchy, expressed in Plato’s Great Chain of Being.

belittled and denied; boys who exhibit “feminine” traits are dishonored, their-ego-construction fragile; girl’s ego-construction is not culturally supported and they are expected to “be there for others;” because of the intersection of privilege and race, nonwhites are mythically “feminized” (i.e.: emotional, irrational, earthy, “there for others” etc.),<sup>21</sup> and their ego-construction is not supported by the dominant culture. Native Americans, Asian Americans, African Americans, LGBTQ, the poor, immigrants, *mestizos*, and other target groups, as well as white affluent straight women, have to negotiate the terrain of their sense of self without the dominant culture’s support, and with its shaming.<sup>22</sup> The result is that often members of target groups are not able to construct a well-constructed ego.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Alienation from self***

1.) *Alienation from self*: centerlessness, due to the particular cultural, psychological, and spiritual experience of women and other target groups.

In *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan wrote eloquently of the women she knew growing up in the fifties who suffered from an undifferentiated dis-ease, “the problem with no name.”<sup>24</sup> These affluent women went to therapy by the droves, women

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<sup>21</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, “Introduction” to *The Second Sex* in *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, ed. Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyun Kim (New York: Routledge, 2003), 36.

<sup>22</sup> Since the oppressions are contingent with the racist patriarchal hierarchy, while they share characteristics, self-construction will draw on diverse resources, including subversive and alternative cultural narratives. I do not presume to speak for everyone. For Martin Luther King’s contribution to the dynamics of self-construction of the oppressed see: Donald M. Chinula, *Building King’s Beloved Community: Foundations for Pastoral Care and Counseling with the Oppressed* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1997), 29-53.

<sup>23</sup> Chinula, *King’s Beloved Community*, 30, 44-45.

<sup>24</sup> Betty Friedan, “The Problem That Has No Name” in *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963), 11-21.



who were well educated with every social advantage.<sup>25</sup> Friedan identified the cause of the unnamed anxiety as a preconscious awareness of the displaced and/or unconstructed ego. Since women had not been encouraged to center themselves within their self-construction, they became “eccentric.”<sup>26</sup> Eccentric literally means “off center”, and therefore metaphorically “off balance.”

Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, spoke of women submitting to societal expectations and not claiming their selves.<sup>27</sup> Eric Erikson introduced the idea of core identity in psychology,<sup>28</sup> providing a way into understanding the social/psychological phenomenon of construction of self. This set the stage for Valerie Saiving’s observations, that women’s self-sacrifice has produced women who do not have a center. This, she wrote, not pride, is the prime sin of women.<sup>29</sup>

We are speaking metaphorically, but the manifestations of this eccentric state also manifest themselves materially with enactments of symbolic actions. Without being conscious of the impulse for these manifestations, women with this centerlessness take on responsibility after responsibility, without knowing how to say “no.” They have an inadequate sense of boundaries between themselves and others. They become like a yoyo

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<sup>25</sup> Not surprisingly, because it was white, affluent women who could afford the time and expense of such care. Since at that time being gay still carried a diagnosis of mental illness, there remained a certain “invisibility” of LGBT persons.

<sup>26</sup> For another view of eccentricity in women revealing classist and sexist assumptions see: Miranda Gill, “Rethinking Eccentricity,” *Research News at Cambridge* (May 1, 2009), <http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/rethinking-eccentricity> (accessed Dec.19, 2012). I conclude that there are two lenses using the same word to describe two phenomena. The eccentric as identified as someone with a strong sense of self whose behavior is odd in relationship with cultural norms (Gill), and those women without a sense of self whose behavior is erratic.

<sup>27</sup> Tong, *Feminist Thought*, 186-87.

<sup>28</sup> J. Roy Hopkins, “Erickson, Erik H” in *The Encyclopedia of Psychology*, ed. Alan Kazdin, vol. 3, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 234-36.

<sup>29</sup> Valerie Saiving, “The Human Situation: A Feminine View,” *Journal of Religion* 40, no. 2 (April 1960), 108–112.

of desires and emotions, restlessly going from project to project. Or they become like a theater stage, expressing emotions on behalf of the men in their lives who cannot express emotion. Or they become unable to discern their own self, voiceless because they have never known their voice to be heard.<sup>30</sup> Or they become smothering mothers, or mothers so afraid of their own gifts that they withdraw from expressing love and wisdom. The women so identify with their husband's success and status that, if that changes, they literally do not have any concept of self.

Therapists have come to understand that this phenomenon also manifests in target groups. In target groups, the phenomenon is understood to be a direct result of societal expectations (such as: to be invisible servants), self-construction in a dangerous and hostile environment, and the "roles" marginal people are allowed to play and what happens when they transgress socially imposed boundaries.<sup>31</sup>

Giving of one's self is not a bad thing, not bad at all, in itself. But women, especially, were expected, always, to be the one to give, adjust, let go, defer, back away, go the extra mile, submit- in a word, to self-sacrifice. I repeat, there is nothing wrong with being there for others. The damage is done when there is a societal and religious expectation that this service and submission is *always* the responsibility of the woman.<sup>32</sup> The damage is done when little girls learn by observing that females do not carry the

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<sup>30</sup> Mary Field Belenky et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1986), 31; Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 64-105.

<sup>31</sup> Chinula, *Building King's Beloved Community*, 44-45.

<sup>32</sup> P. Scott Richards, Rand K. Hardman, and Michael E. Berrett, *Spiritual Approaches in the Treatment of Women with Eating Disorders* (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2007), 55- 56.

societal value that males carry.<sup>33</sup> The damage is done when the stories of women highlight submission to authority, and revise or ignore major events when the woman confronted authority.<sup>34</sup> The damage is done when women hear exhortations to sacrificial holiness as a command that they become selfless, when they hear that selfish is the opposite of selfless. The same is true of members of minority groups. As a result of these religious and social pressures, it has been very difficult for females and members of minorities to construct their sense of self. While there are also biological pressures for females to successfully care for infants and young children, it is the religious and cultural interpretation of the biology that creates the conditions being discussed.

This is not to say that all women and members of minorities, or throughout their entire lives, have had unconstructed egos, especially if they have meaningful work and/or supportive communities. And, as always, there is the possibility of grace. It should be also noted, that these women and men who succeeded in constructing healthy egos often paid for it through being socially dishonored and their accomplishments belittled.<sup>35</sup>

To compound the lack of support for healthy ego construction, shame is still a societal threat, and gaining honor is provisional on their avoiding shame.<sup>36</sup> In other

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<sup>33</sup> Marian V. Liautaud, "Half the Sky is Falling: Unnatural Selection Traces the World's Missing Girls Back to Powerful Western Institutions," *Christianity Today* 55, no. 10 (October, 2011): 36-37.

<sup>34</sup> For example, St. Teresa of Avila, who, to accomplish her foundations and reforms, went behind the back of obstructing clergy and found others who gave the necessary permissions. Rowan Williams, *Teresa of Avila* (Cornwall: Continuum, 2003), 6.

<sup>35</sup> For example, Hildegard of Bingen was first introduced to me by our convent chaplain as "that crazy woman."

<sup>36</sup> Recent "slut shaming" by Rush Limbaugh and others in the conservative media of Sandra Fluke for testifying for the need for contraception to be covered by health plans. *The Rush Limbaugh Show* (Feb. 29, 2012), <http://rncnyc2004.blogspot.com/2012/03/rush-limbaugh-radio-show-on-sandra.html> (accessed April 4, 2013).

words, there is still huge pressure on girls to be perceived as “good”<sup>37</sup> as a defining characteristic.<sup>38</sup> Especially, but not solely, fundamentalist churches foster fear of shaming as even talking about sex is taboo, so the girls (and boys) do not have the necessary knowledge to know what is actually considered shameful.<sup>39</sup> At the same time they are taught to deny themselves self and place God at the center- wise advice for the well-constructed ego, but not for the unconstructed ego. Thus trained, they can be disconnected from any negative feelings, any personal desires, or even any preferences at all.<sup>40</sup> Eventually, when they look at themselves, they simply see no one there.

Most of the centerless women I have counseled either grew up in the 1950s or are from a culture or religious group where hierarchical patriarchy is embraced. The latter group includes isolated rural Vermont women. In my work, the most evident symptom is one of bewilderment when they try to observe the person who they are, the most basic definition of self.<sup>41</sup> I found that, though the root cause of lack of a healthy ego is psychological, it had been amplified by the women’s spiritualities.

This inadequately constructed self, this “centerlessness,” is supported, even if not created, by a very unhealthy spirituality. My questions concerning centerlessness

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<sup>37</sup> “Good” in reference to women in our culture always carries a sexual purity connotation. Any stepping over any boundary carries with it the connotation that the woman must also be sexually impure.

<sup>38</sup> “Rebels”, then, define themselves in contradistinction with what is perceived as being “good.” Since it is primarily sexual behavior that still defines what it is to be good and bad girls, and this distinction does not carry over to boys, we see another vestige of the patriarchy.

<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth Esther, “I Kissed My Humanity Goodbye: How the Evangelical Purity Culture Dehumanizes Women” BlogHer Publishing Network, posted Jan 22, 2013, <http://www.elizabethesther.com/2013/01/i-kissed-my-humanity-goodbye-how-the-evangelical-purity-culture-dehumanizes-women.html> (accessed Jan. 25, 2013). See Appendix 5.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Stephanie Dowrick, *Intimacy and Solitude: Balancing Closeness and Independence* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1995), 7, following Piero Ferrucci, *What We May Be: Visions and Techniques of Psychosynthesis* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Turnstone Press, 1982). The importance of this cannot be overstated.

include: how can we inoculate ourselves and those in our pastoral care against unhealthy mindsets and expectations as well as against misappropriating biblical phrases and examples; what other paradigms can we teach that foster building centered selves; how can we affirm what is good in a person's desire to serve without re-inscribing oppression; and how can we teach others how to discern between healthy and unhealthy spiritualities.

By the end of my vocation as a nun, this non-presence was my experience of self. I was burned out, *and* that loss of self was both part of the cause and the result of the burn-out. I had done what I could to maintain a healthy spirituality, but in the end, the life-long practice of placing myself at the periphery was stronger than the practice of self-love. I knew *in theory* that self-care was important, but the actual living out of the monastic/teaching life was a daily letting go of what would have nourished me in the long run. I loved my Sisters and the children, so their needs, their persons required more and more attention. I could not let myself practice what I was teaching others about self-care. Too much of the self-erasing nun myth was eating me up. I constantly chose to live the myth rather than face into the guilt of not living it. I had no strong healthy paradigm to sufficiently challenge it.

I did have a mental image: I saw the ocean, deep, so unimaginably deep. At the bottom of the ocean I saw my "self", like a rock. It was so deep I could not touch it, so deep that I could not swim down that far, even if I tried. I had no capability to destroy it ("die to self to live to God")<sup>42</sup> or even to move it. That self was in God's hands, not

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<sup>42</sup> From Gal 2:20. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

mine, so I had best trust it to God. When I burned out, I knew that my self was there, whether or not I felt any connection. The non-judgmental way the self was revealed, the unqualified “isness” of it, helped me to accept my healthy self. Healing from burn-out took years. To continue in healing, I have made the image a part of a new paradigm, an anchor for stability in the ocean of God’s love.

Once we have seen the connection between the “eccentric” person and spirituality, we can begin to identify those things that can begin to heal the psyche.<sup>43</sup> First, the person needs a theology that centers God as Love and a spiritual practice that supports an ongoing *relationship* with this God who is Love. For a Buddhist, this might take the form of the teaching of the Compassionate Buddha.<sup>44</sup> In my experience, the idea of God as Judge may safely be handled within the context of God as Love, if God as Love is truly the central icon. The undergirding theology of God as Love provides the safe place in which people can begin to see themselves, recognize themselves as discrete humans, the primary building blocks of self-construction. In that safe place they can see themselves as loved, begin to feel that the relationship between them and God is based in love. Then, by affirming their “loveliness” they can confirm their own God-given right to exist and begin to claim or reclaim their self. However, especially at the beginning of process, it may not feel safe at all, but threatening, because it requires the destruction of the fragile false self which based its existence on things outside itself.

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<sup>43</sup> Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace, Guides to Theological Inquiry* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 94-125.

<sup>44</sup> Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva is known in China as Kwon Yin (various spellings), in Tibet as Chenrezig, and in Japan as Kanon. His/Her name in means “the one (or: the lord) who hears the cries of the world.” Martin Palmer and Jay Ramsay with Man-Ho Kwok, *Kuan Yin: Myths and Prophecies of the Chinese Goddess of Compassion* (London: Thorsons, 1995), 5.

While professional psychological therapy is helpful in the construction of the self in an adult, this theological dimension is necessary for the religious person to perceive God as giving “permission” to do the construction work. Without this permission, there will be inner conflict, anxiety, and resistance. Because the damaging theology is ubiquitous, the conflict needs to be named and worked through. This includes identifying unhealthy social mores, passages in scripture, and other religious authorities, stories, and symbols. The work would also include identifying healthy social mores, passages in scripture, and other religious authorities, stories, and, because this is deep soul work, especially healthier symbols.<sup>45</sup> Among the best symbol/theology work for the healing of this particular wound is holistic creation-affirming theologies.

### ***Alienation of Authority***

2.) *Alienation of authority*: a theology that gives patriarchal power-over to leaders, and disempowers the rest of the community.

Leadership and authority provide clarity, guidance, and expertise. However, when a church espouses hierarchical patriarchy, the power invested in the leader has few correctives.<sup>46</sup> It become unhealthy when the person in authority in a religious organization has either appropriated for themselves or been invested by the members with unquestioned and unbounded authority.<sup>47</sup> Once that power-over is given, there is little incentive for accountability towards the powerless. As a result of this power-over type of

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<sup>45</sup> When I worked as a mental health chaplain on the psych wards and at the State hospital I was taught that it is generally accepted by mental health professionals and spiritual counselors that no real change can happen until there is a paradigm shift, and that is symbolic work.

<sup>46</sup> Steve Arterburn and Jack Felton, *Toxic Faith: Experiencing Healing from Painful Spiritual Abuse* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2001), 138, 142.

<sup>47</sup> David Johnson and Jeff Van Vonderen, *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1991), 116, 128, 143. Cf. Arterburn and Felton, *Toxic Faith*, 143.

authority, anyone who questions, has doubts, doesn't follow exactly, or is not an echo chamber for the leader becomes a target for persecution, shame, and shunning. The intersection of the hierarchical world-view and an honor/shame culture creates an unchallenged view of spiritual leadership roles.<sup>48</sup>

In a spiritually abusive church, the person with authority uses fear to control others. The fear includes the fear of loss of community, fear of loss of status in the community, and fear of damnation for all eternity. The organization is invested in a narrative that blames the victim of abuse. As a result, they and their leader cannot reflect on their own behavior as abusive. The dynamics are spiritually unhealthy because they cause great suffering of those abused,<sup>49</sup> they encourage denial of ongoing abuse, and deny the mutuality that is needed for any community to be healthy. The "rightness" of this arrangement goes unchallenged.

A hierarchical relationship may not necessarily be oppressive.<sup>50</sup> It is the power-over that is inherently problematic. Doesn't hierarchical imply power-over? In real life, yes, it often does. But, in theory at least, it provides a way of organizing and sanctioning use of authority within the group.<sup>51</sup> It provides a way to assign responsibility. Because

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<sup>48</sup> Arterburn and Felton, *Toxic Faith*, 153, 209, 215.

<sup>49</sup> Marlene Winell, "It's Time to Recognize Religious Trauma Syndrome" (paper presented at the Texas Freethinkers Convention, Oct. 8, 2010), <http://www.marlenewinell.net/religious-trauma-syndrome-its-> (accessed Feb. 12, 2013). Winell advocates for the acceptance of the diagnosis Religious Trauma Syndrome, within complex post-traumatic stress disorder (C-PTSD). Cf. Marlene Winell, interview by Valerie Tarico, *AlterNet*, posted March 25, 2013, <http://www.alternet.org/belief/religious-trauma-syndrome-how-some-organized-religion-leads-mental-health-problems?paging=off> (accessed March 25, 2013).

<sup>50</sup> Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 5, 10.

<sup>51</sup> Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, translated by Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), III: 6. 9. Hereafter *Scivias*. The numbers refer to the Book, the Vision, and the section within the vision.



the power is revealed, rather than hidden, agreed-upon rules of appropriate use of one's role can be established.

There are three insights the leader must have that help to secure a safe authority.<sup>52</sup> First, the leader must accept that they are fundamentally a member of the community he or she serves. Second, the leader needs to accept that the source of their authority coming both from "a higher source" *and* from the community the authority serves. Third, the leader needs to accept that their authority is dependent upon being responsible towards both the "higher source" and the community. Members of the community need to accept these ideas as well. Without both the leader and the community served accepting these insights, power-over happens, and that is oppression.

What does authority and power-over have to do with a healthy or unhealthy spirituality? At the least, religious leaders are *loci* for people's ideation of the object of worship. Though the religious leader him/herself is not God, and everyone knows that, the subconscious looks to the leader to find out clues about what the object of worship might be like. This is unconsciously enacted by both the leader and the congregation. This is similar to the phenomenon of children projecting God on their parents and their parents on God. The more the leader claims to be the spiritual authority, the more the congregation will conflate the leader's will with God's will; the more the congregation claims that their leader possesses spiritual authority, the more power-over they hand over

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<sup>52</sup> Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity?: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2012), 123-124.

to their leader.<sup>53</sup> This creates a situation where the stakes become higher and higher for the leader and thus the pressure increases for the leader to exercise power-over.<sup>54</sup>

For members of the congregation, disagreeing with the leader is anxiety-producing, sometimes to the point of fear of loss of identity.<sup>55</sup> Spirituality, to be healthy, must have room for the person to question, to change, to grow, to be safe, and to feel cherished. None of these are possible in a power-over relationship, because the relationship is contingent upon the good graces of the leader. One's salvation is understood to be at risk. When unquestioned obedience to the church authorities is believed to be demanded by the ultimate meaning-giver, God, or one's value is contingent upon being close to and approved by God's vicar, questioning, challenging authority, and loss of status within the church become occasions for deep anxiety.<sup>56</sup>

Also, power-over creates factions in the congregation and power struggles between factions for that access.<sup>57</sup> This is an unhealthy dynamic in its own right, but especially so in the context of spirituality because the relationships and the conflicts take place in that church's religious paradigms, primary meaning-givers for the members. Everything is written in capital letters, as it were.<sup>58</sup>

The power-over paradigm is equally unhealthy emotionally and spiritually for the leader. This leadership paradigm carries the psychological pressures for self-justification,

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<sup>53</sup> Arterburn and Felton, *Toxic Faith*, 138.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>55</sup> Esther, "I Kissed My Humanity Goodbye."

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>57</sup> Johnson and Van Vonderen, *Subtle Power*, 133-135.

<sup>58</sup> Arterburn and Felton, *Toxic Faith*, 52,-54, 152-154.

confusing God's will with one's own.<sup>59</sup> Also, as the bearer of the role of *locus* of the holy, the leader experiences the pressure of perfectionism within him/herself, and the pressure of unrealistic expectations from the congregation.<sup>60</sup> Even if the leader succeeds in keeping sane and holy in such circumstances, when he or she leaves, the unrealistic expectations of the congregation continue, amplified. Their successor will rarely succeed; they have been set up for failure.<sup>61</sup>

What would a healthy leadership dynamic spirituality look like? It need not be nonhierarchical, as I argued above, but it does need to be grounded in mutuality. This mutuality would acknowledge differences of gifts and authorities, and foster a world-view of interdependence.<sup>62</sup> In this world-view, hierarchy becomes one more way in which gifts and responsibilities are expressed, not a primordial value system giving some humans essentially more value than others. Hierarchy becomes a mechanism within creation rather than an ontology upon which creation or society depends.

### ***Alienation from Materiality***

3.) *Alienation from materiality*: a dualistic theology that sets spirit against materiality and privileges humanity over the rest of creation.

It is also unhealthy, spiritually and physically, to be alienated from the material world in which we live and which constructs our existence.<sup>63</sup> Much spirituality, though eschewing the greatest excesses of dualism, has an inherent dichotomy: either spirit or

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<sup>59</sup> Arterburn and Felton, *Toxic Faith*, 143.

<sup>60</sup> Viola and Barna, *Pagan Christianity*, 137-140.

<sup>61</sup> Arterburn and Felton, *Toxic Faith*, 142.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>63</sup> Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 7.

material.<sup>64</sup> This mindset, in turn, causes alienation from one's own body and the sensual world, raising feeling of guilt and shame about sex and sexuality,<sup>65</sup> as well as shame and distrust of other pleasures and delight through the senses. In this grey world, dry duty becomes the organizing principle of life. The joy and vibrancy of creation becomes suspect as temptation away from holiness and God. This is unhealthy not because duty can be dry, but because the alienation from sensuous nature starves our humanity and makes us brittle against other fellow travelers. Alienation from the creative order creates a milieu in which it is perfectly acceptable to drive species to extinction, perfectly acceptable to poison the air, soil, and waters.<sup>66</sup> Alienation from the materiality of creation is unhealthy spirituality.

Grounding means being connected to the materiality of existence in this creation.<sup>67</sup> In practice it can mean something as simple as feeling one's feet on the floor before meditation, or as complicated as a theology of stewardship. Grounding is necessary for both the particular human in their spiritual practices and for humanity collectively as we dwell on "this fragile earth, our island home."<sup>68</sup>

Being ungrounded can be the result of theologies that belittle materiality. It can be the result of spiritual practices that place no value in the here and now, physicality,

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<sup>64</sup> Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 44.

<sup>65</sup> Ronald W. Morris, "Linking Sexuality and Spirituality in Childhood: beyond body-spirit dualism and towards an education of the inspirited sensual body," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 6, no. 2 (2001): 162.

<sup>66</sup> Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 25.

<sup>67</sup> "Grounding," to be "grounded" is a metaphor widely used in spiritual, meditation, or mental health practice. While I found the use of the word ubiquitous, I did not find an authoritative definition. One example from the mental health field will be found on page 90: note 215.

<sup>68</sup> *Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing Inc., 1979), 370. Hereafter *BCP*.

and materiality. It is a constant danger for those who suffered abuse as children.<sup>69</sup> When societies become ungrounded, this dissociation becomes a root cause of the reckless exploitation and despoiling of nature.<sup>70</sup> This collective dissociation causes disasters, diseases, and extinction of species; for example: mud slides after hurricanes are often the direct result of deforestation. On a personal level, the dissociation with materiality leads to belief of entitlement; there is no reason to be thankful if one is unconscious of belonging to a greater whole or of being fundamentally dependent. This alienates the person from not only the creator and the cosmos, but also their fellow humanity. At its extreme, being ungrounded can cause the dissolution of the integrity of the personality.<sup>71</sup>

A healthy spiritual practice is one that is grounded in reality. Writing about the meeting of art and worship, Brother David Steindl-Rast names perceiving, acknowledging, and blessing the real as the interior soul-space in which spiritual work safely happens.<sup>72</sup> Our senses, God-given, are important mediators between what is real outside us and what is real within us. They are not our only source of intelligence, but they are of particular importance in this aspect of a healthy spirituality. A grounded spirituality is one in which we open our created, blessed physicality to the informing work of the creator spirit. The grounding in sensual experience fixes us, plants us, in a place of spiritual nourishment and psychological safety.

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<sup>69</sup> Cara L. Stiles, "The Influence of Childhood Dissociative States from Sexual Abuse on the Adult Woman's Spiritual Development," *Journal of Heart-Centered Therapies* 10, no. 1 (2007), 9, [http://www.wellness-institute.org/images/Journal\\_10-1\\_Sexual\\_Abuse\\_and\\_Spiritual\\_Development.pdf](http://www.wellness-institute.org/images/Journal_10-1_Sexual_Abuse_and_Spiritual_Development.pdf) (accessed March 4, 2013).

<sup>70</sup> Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women Ecology and Development* (Totowa, NJ: Zed Books, 1989), 34.

<sup>71</sup> Stiles, "The Influence of Childhood Dissociative States," 9.

<sup>72</sup> Brother David Steindl-Rast, *Common Sense Spirituality: The Essential Wisdom of David Steindl-Rast* (New York, The Crossroads Publishing Company, 2008), 48-50.

Brother Steindl-Rast describes the conditions in which this grounding takes place. Firstly, there is stillness, one stops to pay attention. Secondly, there is the awe of discovery. Thirdly, there is the person's response, a "yes", or their blessing of that perceived reality. I will examine each part in relation to how and why this supports a healthy spirituality.

1.) Stillness does not mean stop breathing, or stop acting, or stop being; it means pausing psychologically and emotionally to allow the senses to inform the soul of reality *outside the control* of the person. I place Steindl-Rast's observations squarely in materiality, as he does himself, without concluding that this is the only form of stillness and the only source of revelation. This is what we humans *can* do in our spiritual practice, take time to pause and pay attention to what our senses are communicating to us, and take it seriously.

2.) The awe of discovery helps us to "let go of our preconceived notions."<sup>73</sup> The awe cuts through the ropes that bind our "self" to the illusion of control, the illusion that we are the final arbiters and definers of things outside us. As the infant learns boundaries of self, so the mature adult continues to identify and honor those boundaries.

3.) The "yes" of blessing is a response of honesty: "Yes, this is real, this is reality. This is not of my imagination, nor is it something I can necessarily control, nor might it be wise for me to try to control this." It becomes a blessing when the person does not try to cling to it, control it, or deny it. However beautiful, bland, or terrible the real is, by blessing it the person reveals God as present in compassionate love.

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<sup>73</sup> Steindl-Rast, *Common Sense Spirituality*, 49.

Facing reality is not in contrast to or opposition to, say, Buddhist or apophatic spirituality. These spiritual practices also encourage the practitioner to face the real; through this, one can know both the presence and the absence of significance in that reality, one can face into the illusions of perception and attachment. Problems come when one becomes attached to the perception, to the acknowledgment, or to the blessing.<sup>74</sup> Attachment to these things, good in themselves, makes them idols. The idols displace the Living God.<sup>75</sup>

The Hebrew and Christian traditions teach the purpose of creation is praise.<sup>76</sup> The centrality of this theme, praise and thanksgiving, is so important that the major “prayer book” in the Bible is the Book of Psalms, titled in Hebrew “*tehillim*”, which translates as “praises.”<sup>77</sup> Praise and thanksgiving then becomes the way in which the person relates to God and to the cosmos. The person is firmly grounded in the concentric existences that are the web of cosmos, the material and spiritual interwoven. The person is also firmly grounded in their dependent *and* reciprocal relationship with God.

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<sup>74</sup> I talked this point over with the Reverend Kenzan Lee Seidenberg, a Buddhist priest from the Shao Shan Temple, East Calais, VT, to make sure I was fairly making an interfaith claim. He agreed with my assessment, as long as I said that the attachment is *part* of what the Buddhists call “illusion” but that it is not the only illusion. The conversation took place in the winter of 2010.

<sup>75</sup> Bruce Rogers-Vaughn, “Best Practices in Pastoral Counseling: Is Theology Necessary?” *American Association of Pastoral Councilors SE Region* (July 2012): 21, 28, 31, <http://aapcsoutheast.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Best-Practices-in-Pastoral-Counseling-Is-Theology-Necessary.pdf> (accessed May 1, 2013).

<sup>76</sup> For example: *The Westminster Catechism*’s first question and answer are “What is the chief end of man?” “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” G.I. Williamson, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism: for Study Classes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Co., 2003), 1. Cf. Isa. 43:7, Matt. 21:16 Psalm 19:1.

<sup>77</sup> John S. Kselman, “Psalms,” in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Michael D. Coogan, ed. (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2001), 776.

As in any adventure, while there are no guarantees of total safety, grounding alleviates the primary causes of pathological dissolution and disassociation. A grounded person can more safely explore the spiritual. The varieties of spiritual experience, the many rooms in the Interior Castle, the apophatic way- all these are possible in the grounded spiritual journey. For the spiritual director, it is important to know how their directee can be cared for, given the most freedom, and yet be fundamentally safe as the directee experiences the spiritual dimension. Grounding is the *sine qua non* for safe passage on the spiritual pilgrimage.

### ***Empathy and Suffering***

4.) *Alienation from empathy either for oneself or for others*: a theology that either denies sin and suffering, or teaches that suffering is from God and is good.

Spirituality is about meaning, and there is nothing that cries out from the human soul more than the need to find meaning in suffering. A healthy spirituality practices acceptance of things one cannot control, builds empathy, advocates for those who suffer. Religious traditions have faced suffering with more or less wisdom, certainly without a generally agreed upon definitive answer on how to face suffering. Christianity, in particular, has placed suffering front and center, based on the suffering of Jesus on the cross.<sup>78</sup>

In some Christian traditions, all suffering is contained in Jesus' suffering. For Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists all the meaning of Jesus as Christ is bound to the

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<sup>78</sup> Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn, "For God So Loved the World?" in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 4-26. Brown and Bohn give an overview and feminist critique of these various theories of suffering.



salvific efficacy of his suffering and death on the cross. One's own suffering is seen as a way to conform to Christ, evidence that one is following Christ.<sup>79</sup>

Suffering can also be seen as a way to participate in Christ's salvific suffering, "offering it up" and being one with Christ for the benefit of others. The extreme form of this is found in the medieval and Roman Catholic understanding of seeking suffering, that one's suffering could be united to Jesus' for the help of souls in purgatory. Or suffering is seen as a sign that one is *not* one with Christ, the suffering a result of one's own sin and sinfulness, and a call for further self-examination and repentance. Or suffering could be God's educational method of choice, teaching us a lesson we need to learn. Or it is seen as just the way things are in this fallen world, the suffering meaningless in itself, which, however, could become a source of spiritual growth, and therefore invested with personal meaning. Each of these answers depends upon a specific theological understanding of Jesus, God, and the cosmos.

All of these theologies have biblical roots,<sup>80</sup> and all of them could be spiritually healthy or unhealthy, depending on why that teaching is taught, how it is heard, and how it is lived. I believe it to be unhealthy for anyone to tell a suffering person the reason for the suffering; I believe that it is healthy for the person who is suffering to find meaning in their suffering, however they may couch it in words and symbols. I do not find it spiritually healthy for them to seek out suffering; I do see it as healthy for them to examine their life and their attitudes to see if there is an intersection between those things

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<sup>79</sup> For example: Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*. Book 2, Chapter 12. The word "suffer" appears 39 times in Book 2 alone; all but a couple of times it is within the context of suffering with Christ's passion. Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (Totowa, NJ: Catholic Book Publishing Corporation, 1993).

<sup>80</sup> For example: The Book of Job and the Epistle to the Philippians.

and the causes of their suffering. I do not think it is spiritually healthy for someone to believe that God plans our suffering, sets us up for suffering, and then makes us suffer for what God planned; I do think it is spiritually healthy for people to use suffering to become more empathetic and understanding, the “wounded healer.” I also believe it to be imperative that we examine the relationship between our individual and collective actions and the suffering in the world around us.

On the other hand, there are some spiritualities that address the problem of suffering by ignoring it: those include Christian Science, Positive Thinking, and the Unity Church. They believe that by attuning one’s mind to Mind (Mind as either personal or impersonal, depending on the particular school of thought), one co-creates the world as intended, good, true, and beautiful; thinking about suffering weakens one’s participation in the ideal world, and makes it more difficult for that world to manifest.<sup>81</sup> This does not foster empathy nor the imagination to seek social solutions to social problems. The benefits of positive thinking should not be underestimated; their practitioners, generally speaking, live long, healthy, and peaceful lives.<sup>82</sup> Yet positive thinking is powerless and voiceless in face of natural and human-made disasters, psychopaths, cancer, penury, and oppression. And it can lead to feelings of guilt and failure when one’s positive thoughts and prayers are “not strong enough” to prevent tragedy, sickness, and loss.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Shakti Gawain, *Creative Visualization* (New York: Bantam Books, 1985), 2-8. Cf. Donald Meyer, *The Positive Thinkers: A Study of Health, Wealth and Personal Power from Mary Baker Eddy to Norman Vincent Peale* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1965).

<sup>82</sup> Michael F. Scheier and Charles S. Carver, “On the Power of Positive Thinking,” *Current Directions of Psychological Science* 2, no. 1 (February 1993): 27- 28.

<sup>83</sup> Cynthia Rittenberg, “Positive Thinking: an Unfair Burden on Cancer Patients?” *Supporting Cancer Care* 3, no. 1 (1995): 37-39.

While there are some similarities between the positive thinker's practice in ignoring that which does not represent Mind and Buddhist teachings on illusion, I would not press the similarities too far. At least from what little I know, there are fundamentally important differences which have an impact on how the practitioners of the two different belief systems perceive and respond to suffering, death, and crises.

Is then positive thinking a healthy or unhealthy spirituality? I would say that it is problematic; much good for the practitioner can come from its practice, but I do not see it building the relationships that I believe are necessary for a healthy spirituality unfolding, nor developing spiritual depth as I understand it, nor does it face the real as it is. Needless to say, positive thinkers and I do not agree on the premise of what is real, let alone what constitutes a relationship. When suffering comes crashing in, as for example, the death of a beloved child, the practitioner has precious few resources with which to integrate the experience. There are real life consequences to that inability; the fundamental "deal" with the universe has been violated, and there often is no viable way in which foundational trust can be restored.

### ***Alienation from others Hyper-individuality***

5.) *Alienation from others*: a theology that focuses exclusively on the individual's relationship with God (hyper-individuality), that does not acknowledge the social, communal, or ecological dimensions of sin and salvation.

Individuality has been a hallmark of Western Culture, investing value in each person, founding the idea of civil rights, personal freedom, and autonomy. However, when the myth of the frontier rugged individual met the evangelical emphasis on

individual salvation, the result was hyper-individualism.<sup>84</sup> Divorced from the history of community which allowed those rugged individuals to survive a hostile environment and divorced from the biblical calls for social justice, hyper-individualism believes the individual is not contingent with community. Alienated from community, they do not believe they are accountable towards the well-being of the community or that they derive their own wellbeing from the community. Alienated from community, they do not acknowledge that their self-centered way of being is damaging and promotes injustice. Lacking a consciousness of the web of interdependency, the hyper-individualists are judgmental towards those in need. They believe that justice is a matter for individuals, and deny the existence of systemic injustice, economic justice, and social justice.<sup>85</sup> They see private charity as the solution to all need, and deny the existence of structural oppression. Hyper-individuality is fundamental alienation from community.

This is an unhealthy spirituality because it denies reality, the reality that no individual is without context, that no individual is exempt from mutuality. The alienation that results makes it impossible for the individual to see interconnectivity, to admit mutual dependency, to justify empathy.

### ***Paradigm Shifts***

Each of these unhealthy spiritualities has roots in a paradigm. These particular paradigms are thoroughly part of Western culture, and often shared with other cultures as

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<sup>84</sup> Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and The Durable Future* (NYC: Holt Paperbacks, 2007), 96. E. J. Dionne, Jr., *Our Divided Political Heart* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 22.

<sup>85</sup> Feminist ethicists critique this understanding of justice. Feminist ethics teaches that humans enter into mature ethics through relationships and caring, rather than rules and priorities. See Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 39, 62-63, 170-172.

well, and seem to be “common sense.” Therefore the task of re-scripting the psyche is countercultural, feels counter-intuitive, and creates feelings of anxiety. It is also important to underscore that, while paradigms seem to explain “how things really are”, they are not-real, they are symbolic language to describe how things have been experienced, how the way things are can be explained. They may or may not reflect the experience of everyone. They may or may not be the healthiest, most holistic way to express humanity. It is also important to realize that the paradigms themselves are symbols, and therefore multivalent, containing within themselves creative contradictions.

Hildegard of Bingen’s compositions, above all else, call her readers to be children of Light.<sup>86</sup> Her illuminations, visions and their interpretations, poetry, and sermons give us ample symbols, a less well-worn path to interpreting ancient paradigms, and grounding to aid in paradigm shifts.

I understand healthy spirituality as one where the person is present, actively responsible towards their own spiritual journey, in relationship with God and their fellow humanity in a matrix of love, and in right relationship with our cosmos of the spiritual and material interwoven.

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<sup>86</sup> . Barbara Newman, “‘Sibyl of the Rhine’: Hildegard’s Life and Times,” in *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World*, ed. Barbara Newman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 9. Hildegard uses the words “Living Light” frequently throughout her writings, sometimes modified by “shadow of” or “reflection” to speak of a continuous experience of that Light and sometimes uses it to speak of direct experience with God. “The Living Light” in Hildegard’s visions instructs her to be the voice of the Living Light. *Scivias*, Declaration. 5. Cf. Eph. 5:8 “for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light.”

## *Chapter 2*

### *Who is this Hildegard and How Can She Help?*

The premise of this thesis is the power of symbolic thought to heal, the soul work of paradigm shifts. In my pastoral work I have found that Hildegard provides us with holistic symbols equal to that task. Why Hildegard? What can a 12<sup>th</sup> century nun possibly have to say to people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? In this chapter we will explore the context in which Hildegard lived and how people of today have found connections between her context and ours. We will explore how her method of teaching through symbols transcends the differences in culture. Since it is largely through symbols that Hildegard taught,<sup>87</sup> we need to consider how symbols work in the psyche.

#### *Magistra Hildegard of Disibodenberg*

Hildegard of Bingen grew up amongst the socially and religiously elite women of Disibodenberg.<sup>88</sup> The founder of her community, Jutta of Sponheim, was an anchorite. The anchorite ideal was derived from the desert hermits rather than the collegial life of the Benedictine Rule. The asceticism<sup>89</sup> was one that emphasized physical discipline, including strict fasting. Jutta destroyed her health with the rigors of her asceticism. Hildegard, who was entrusted to Jutta at age eight, saw firsthand how destructive that

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<sup>87</sup> Two of her books, *Scivias* and *Book of Divine Works*, are based on her symbolic visions. The rhetoric of her sermons is entirely based on archetypes and other symbols, as I will discuss later. Her letters are full of symbolic language.

<sup>88</sup> Barbara Newman, "Sibyl of the Rhine," 1-29. The biographical information included in this thesis is from this source.

<sup>89</sup> *Ascesis*: from Greek, literally: exercise. *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed., s.v. "asceticism." The word is derived from athletes' practice that prepares them for competition. (1 Cor. 9:27: "I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should...")

spiritual practice was. When Jutta died, Hildegard was unanimously elected *magistra*<sup>90</sup> of her community, which by then was following the Rule of St. Benedict. As *magistra*, Hildegard was entrusted foremost with her nuns' spiritual wellbeing, as well as the responsibility for the wholesome administration of her small, elite community. As the title *magistra* suggests, she was entrusted with teaching and spiritual counsel. This didactic purpose is found in all of her works, from her expositions of her visions to her poetry to her scientific treatises.<sup>91</sup> She didn't just describe visions for their own sake, or break open spiritual or scientific knowledge to win an argument; she related all knowledge to what she believed was the purpose of life: to praise God and live in righteousness.<sup>92</sup>

Her holistic theology became a bulwark against the Cathars, a dualistic heresy.<sup>93</sup> In her capacity as *magistra*, she was canonically required to give expositions<sup>94</sup> to her Community. As a result of her fame and the Cathar threat, she was also invited to preach at other Communities, male and female, as well as the Cathedral of Cologne and other churches, the only woman in the Middle Ages to be authorized to do so.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> *Magistra*: leader, teacher, head of a women's monastic Community; the word is related to magistrate, magisterial, and the Masters degree one receives from a university, (*meister, maestro, maitre*). All translations of particular Latin words are from William Whitaker, *Words*, 1993-2010 in the University of Notre Dame Archives. <http://archives.nd.edu/words.html> (accessed 2004-2013).

<sup>91</sup> Beverly Kienzle, "Introduction" in *Hildegard of Bingen: Homilies on the Gospels*, trans. with intro. and notes by Beverly Mayne Kienzle, (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2011), 2, 7.

<sup>92</sup> *rectus*: (partic. from *rego*) vertical; uprightness; right, correct; rule. Righteousness also means being in right relationship. This is an important word for Hildegard, occurring frequently in her compositions.

<sup>93</sup> Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 249.

<sup>94</sup> Beverly Mayne Kienzle, *Hildegard of Bingen and Her Gospel Homilies: Speaking New Mysteries* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2009), 3. *Expositiones*: sermons or homilies, expounding on the meaning of a portion or portions of Scripture.

<sup>95</sup> Beverly Mayne Kienzle, *Cistercians, Heresy and Crusade in Occitania, 1145-1229: Preaching in the Lord's Vineyard* (Suffolk, England: York Medieval Press, 2001), 4. Other women did preach in

At the time of Hildegard's election, her monastery was a dependent of the Disibodenberg Abbey. The monks of that abbey provided the women with the sacraments, spiritual counsel, fiscal oversight, legal and physical protection, and access to one of the great libraries of the Middle Ages. The monks benefitted from the prayers of the women, from reflected fame from the reputation of their holiness, from the alms of the pilgrims who came to visit the holy and wise women, from the association with the noble families of the nuns, and from the dowries of the women. Living at the very walls of a great abbey, Hildegard could rely on the advice and protection of their abbot, and the spiritual counsel and practical help of one of their monks, Volmer, who would prove to be essential in her development as prophet, author, and founder.

Under Hildegard, the community of nuns outgrew their residence and the legal, economic, and ecclesial need for dependency on the men's abbey. In order for her community to flourish, she needed to found an independent monastery. Establishing economic and ecclesial independence, funding the new monastic buildings, and removing control over the dowry assets of her nuns from the abbey into the new foundation was a huge undertaking. It was largely because of her international reputation as a holy prophet that she succeeded.<sup>96</sup> Even the founding document issued in 1152 by the Archbishop of Mainz repeated the claim that these women had left St. Disibod for Mount St. Rupert owing to a revelation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>97</sup> The founding was an outward and visible sign

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public but they were not authorized to do so, and it was dangerous for them. Rose of Viterbo is an example. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J Walker, eds., *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 99-199.

<sup>96</sup> Fox, Introduction to *BDW*, x.

<sup>97</sup> John Van Engen, "Abbess: Mother and Teacher," in *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World*, ed. Barbara Newman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 42.



of the inward and invisible work she was doing with her nuns, founding New Jerusalem through their virtue, their singing the Offices, their prayers, and their dedicated lives.

### *A Crisis of Communal and Personal Value*

In the Twelfth Century the question of simony was increasingly raised about how a novice found placement in a monastery.<sup>98</sup> The question exposed a vicious cycle which came out of the feudal economy and canon law. At admission, monks and especially nuns were required to present a dowry to assure their presence would not impoverish the Community. Since the economy was feudal, the dowry usually included properties with serfs. Canon law increasingly curtailed the types of works allowed of monasteries and monastics. This was especially restrictive for the nuns, who were seen to be in economically unfair competition with men with families. In order to survive, the monastics needed the dowries; the dowries were increasingly seen as “payment” for the ecclesial office held by the monastic, that is, simony. The nuns, in particular, who had been honored for their dedicated life, now were shamed by the rhetoric of social critics. This critique gave rise to the reformers who would become the Beguines, Waldensians, and the mendicants. The prayers of an honored dedicated virgin had been valued; the prayers of a simoniac parasite did not carry value. Into this loss of status, Hildegard brought symbols that reclaimed the worth and value of her nuns’ dedicated lives and their prayers. Classism and sexism, oppression and internalized oppression were all clearly operative in Hildegard’s experience, and yet she and her nuns were able to survive and flourish.

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<sup>98</sup> McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 227-228, 274-275.

### *Compositions as Ethical Instruction*

“Wisdom teaches in the light of love.”<sup>99</sup>

In Hildegard’s position as *magistra*, her teaching responsibility was to ensure the ethical, spiritual, and psychological wellbeing of the members of her community and of the community as a whole.<sup>100</sup> She was responsible for their education and for stirring up devotion within them, so that they would have the desire to continue to grow in charity and holiness of life.<sup>101</sup> She especially understood that teaching the virtues is best done through engaging the imagination, that symbolic language is more effective than didactic reasoning in creating personal change, in addressing the heart and will.

In all her writings and compositions, Hildegard teaches moral action. She teaches that moral action is based in relationship. First the relationship is revealed; the moral action is in response to the relationship.<sup>102</sup> The relationship is revealed through an image or set of images (symbol clusters). All of her teaching is done through images, symbols that stimulate the imagination, encourage an interior dialogue, and place the moral realm within a theological framework of relationality. The same symbols will be found in her poems, illuminations, opera, and sermons. Since her symbols come from nature, the Bible, and a curriculum of commonly accepted authorities, her educated audience held a common point of reference.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Hildegard of Bingen, *Vita*, I: 1, translated and cited in Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: a Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (203) to Marguerite Porete (1310)*, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 145.

<sup>100</sup> Kienzle, *Hildegard of Bingen and Her Gospel Homilies*, 109.

<sup>101</sup> Kienzle, *Hildegard of Bingen: Homilies on the Gospels*, 17.

<sup>102</sup> Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), 110-111.

<sup>103</sup> Kienzle, *Hildegard of Bingen: Homilies on the Gospels*, 8-10.

*Expositiones evangeliorum* is the collection of her sermons, most, but not all, given to her community.<sup>104</sup> While other genres have flexibility in choice of symbols, her sermons must canonically be based on the biblical lectionary reading of the day for which it was composed. However, she exercises great flexibility in how she treats the biblical images; the symbol clusters resonate far beyond the actual biblical text.

Hildegard invariably uses tropological allegory in her biblical exegesis, that is: she uses metaphor to teach morals, type/archetype to connect biblical pericopes to other pericopes, and connects her nun's lives to those pericopes.<sup>105</sup> In concert with a microcosmos/macrocosmos world-view, her interconnected themes are:

- 1) the collective struggle of humankind in salvation history,
- 2) the journey of the faithful soul,
- 3) the individual and collective battles against sin that the nun and her community wage in monastic life,
- 4) the cosmological theme of the harmony of cosmic elements reestablished with the soul's restoration.<sup>106</sup>

For Hildegard, it was of primary importance that her nuns be well grounded in scriptures. The *opus Dei*,<sup>107</sup> the liturgical prayer of the monastery, is comprised of biblical texts and other texts based on the biblical texts. Study and memorizing of

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<sup>104</sup> Kienzle, *Hildegard of Bingen: Homilies on the Gospels*, 6; Kienzle, *Hildegard of Bingen and her Gospel Homilies*, 42-55.

<sup>105</sup> Kienzle, *Hildegard of Bingen and her Gospel Homilies*, 154.

<sup>106</sup> O. C. Edwards, Jr., *A History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 200, citing Kienzle's "Hildegard of Bingen's Teaching in her *Expositiones evangeliorum* and *Ordo virtutum*" in *Medieval Monastic Education*, ed. George Ferzoco and Carolyn Muessig (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 2000), 72-86.

<sup>107</sup> *Opus Dei*, literally: the Work of God. In the *Regula Monachorum*, St. Benedict uses those words to designate the liturgical vocal prayer of the monastics. Since much of the bible was repeated with frequency, monastics memorized much of the Bible, as well as other texts included in the liturgy.

scripture is part of the liturgical life of the *opus Dei*.<sup>108</sup> Not only is every psalm sung at least once a week, through the antiphons, responsories and hymns, other parts of the Bible are also sung or heard read. The Bible, commentaries, and expositions are read at various liturgical and communal moments throughout each day and night. So her nuns were well prepared to understand the biblical text, and to have deep reservoirs of biblical symbols and symbol clusters.<sup>109</sup>

Hildegard presupposes that her nuns know philosophical categories and concepts. She assumes such knowledge as four elements, microcosm/macrocosm, and the music of the spheres. Above all, she assumes the intelligent good-will of her Sisters, never talking down to them or belittling or dismissing them. She treats them as intellectual and spiritual equals. And she protects them from the ever increasing misogyny of the 12<sup>th</sup> century by inoculating them with a sense of self-worth.

### *The Holistic Cosmos*

Hildegard's holistic theology binds together the whole cosmos. One of her best known symbols for the cosmos, the Cosmic Egg,<sup>110</sup> reveals creation as spirit *and* material. The Cosmic Egg shows a creation which is one- all the created orders are within its egg-shaped limits. The spiritual angelic order is part of the created order, as much as the material order is. Their mutuality and interdependence is one of Hildegard's great themes. When she writes about her nuns' singing and their practicing the virtues as

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<sup>108</sup> Kienzle, *Hildegard of Bingen: Homilies on the Gospels*, 9-10. I describe the *opus Dei* as Hildegard would have experienced it, as it is prescribed in the Rule. In the past century, modifications have taken place, different Congregations modifying it or not, according to their needs.

<sup>109</sup> In my research I found Hildegard frequently used symbols found in Genesis (creation myth, "fall" of Adam.), Song of Songs, Ezekiel, Revelation, the Gospels (especially the parables).

<sup>110</sup> For example: *Scivias* I. 3. See: Appendix 1 A. *Scivias* I. 3. *Cosmos*, Greek: lit. an ordered system, harmonious.

the stones building up the New Jerusalem, she is speaking exactly to this interpenetration of the created orders. In other words, through Hildegard's holistic theology and symbols we have a way of talking about creation that is not based on an either/or duality, but on interdependence, mutuality, with value given by God to all creation, both/and. "And God saw it was good."<sup>111</sup>

On the basis of that theological understanding, we can begin to reclaim our interdependence and mutuality with the created order, not as something to be ashamed of, but as an expression of our religious and spiritual grounding. We can reclaim our physical nature and appetites as godly, that is, as expressions of holiness because they are expressions of wholeness in the intention of the Creator. The serious enterprise of living gently on this earth is given a theological imperative, energizing folk for the hard work of building an ecologically sound and just economy. This work is also a healthy spirituality which can be supported by meditating on Hildegard's symbols and teachings.

Hildegard of Bingen was profoundly aware of the interrelationships within cosmos, the spiritual inbreathing and outbreathing in the material, calling it into existence and loving it. She was also profoundly aware of moral struggle, personal and societal, and the devastating effects of evil. Her expositions, including those on her visions as well as in her sermons, are consistently both/and. Hildegard teaches that we live in a beloved, spirit-filled cosmos filled with beauty, *and* where there is also evil and suffering. Personal piety takes place in the cosmic struggle- microcosm/macrocosm. What her nuns

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<sup>111</sup> Genesis 1. Hildegard quotes this many times in her writings and sermons. Her exegesis of this sentence and the whole of Gen. 1 and 2 forms the foundation of her holistic teaching on *viriditas*.

did, what the emperor did, what the herbs did, all had cosmic influence.<sup>112</sup> Like looking backwards through the telescope of astrology,<sup>113</sup> instead of just the stars influencing our behavior, we also influence theirs! Her task as *magistra* was to equip her listeners with the tools, courage, and wisdom to build the reign of God, through praise and uprightness, to fill the soul (and *Ecclesia* and the cosmos) with good things (virtues) so that there was no room for evil (vice).

### *Influence today*

Why should a woman who lived in a very different world from ours, with a very different point of reference, be a source of wisdom for us now? How can someone invested in the privilege of aristocracy speak to our need for egalitarian relationships? How can a woman who lived a severely circumscribed life, in a feudal society, without benefit of our scientific knowledge, speak to our spiritual health? At first glance, she seems an unlikely candidate. And yet, her popularity has only grown exponentially in the past half century. To what can we attribute this? And how can we incorporate her wisdom into our very different world? I have identified five threads of interest in Hildegard for our time: 1. herbalists, 2. music, 3. art (illuminations), 4. ecology and eco-justice, and 5. holistic feminism. To that I add my own interest in her ascetic and aesthetic theology and healthy spirituality, which arise from these five.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Schipperges, “*Hildegard of Bingen: Healing and the Nature of the Cosmos*,” 56-57.

<sup>113</sup> My analogy, not Hildegard’s, who knew astrology but did not know the telescope.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Matthew Fox, *Hildegard of Bingen: A Saint for Our Times: Unleashing Her Power in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Namaste Publishing, 2012); Mary Sharratt, “Reasons Why Hildegard Matters Now,” *Huffington Post*, posted on Oct. 27, 2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mary-sharratt/8-reasons-why-hildegard-matters-now\\_b\\_2006626.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mary-sharratt/8-reasons-why-hildegard-matters-now_b_2006626.html) (accessed Dec. 21, 2012).

1. *Herbalists*: In Europe, Hildegard is known widely for her herbal teachings, based on *Physica* and *Causae et Curae*.<sup>115</sup> Even non-Christian Europeans with only the slightest knowledge of the Middle Ages and Christianity know of her as an herbalist. Europeans have a long-standing acceptance of herbalists, holistic medicine, and naturopaths. While her books are based on theory and a theological cosmology, they are practical in purpose, and earth-affirming. That is resonant with the ecologically minded green-consciousness that is common in secular Europe, so her herbal teaching is well-established in Europe. Thanks to the internet, translations of her works, and the growth of interest in holistic medicine, it is also increasingly known in America.<sup>116</sup>

2. *Music*: In America and in Europe others have first come to know Hildegard of Bingen through her music. Since *Anonymous 4* and *Sequentia* popularized her music through their concerts and recordings, other musicians have incorporated her music into their own concerts, or used them as a platform for further creative exploration.<sup>117</sup> Early Music festivals, churches, and music schools perform her works, including her opera, *Ordo Virtutum*; Longy School of Music offers a course on it culminating with a performance. One of my friends, Susan, was part of the Vermont women's ensemble *Anima*, which specialized in Hildegard's music.

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<sup>115</sup> The two books, *Physica* and *Causae et Curae*, are from two different collections of Hildegard's writings. While they share some of the same material word for word, there remain differences. Priscilla Throop, "Introduction," in *Hildegard of Bingen's Physica*, trans. Priscilla Throop (Rochester, VT: Healing Arts Press, 1998), 2.

<sup>116</sup> For example, Wighard Strehlow and Gottfried Hertzka, *Hildegard of Bingen's Medicine*, (Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Company, 1988).

<sup>117</sup> For example, the CD *Vision*, a recording by Emily Van Evera and others.

Susan brings me to where Hildegard's music and healing touch.<sup>118</sup> Susan lost her very young daughter in a tragic car accident. Susan's grief was overwhelming, profoundly soul-painful to the point of devastation. Life was not endurable. A friend gave her a recording of Hildegard's music. Susan filled her tub with hot water, lit candles and put on the music. She allowed herself to sob and grieve and feel, surrounded by flickering candles, warm water, and the flowing music. She made a ritual of this over and over and over. The gentle light of the candles, the moisture and warmth and cleanliness, the ebb and flow of the music gradually placed her on a healing path. Grief was given its time, and the ritual allowed the sacred, safe place for it to happen. Susan credits Hildegard's music with her survival.

I personally experienced the power of her music when I prepared and sang Hildegard's *Ordo Virtutum* as a project for a seminary class. I sang all the parts, and in doing so I used my whole voice range from lowest to highest. *Anima*, the prophets, and each virtue had its unique quality, both words and music, which resonated with some aspect of my soul and body. It was a visceral experience.

3. Art (illumination): Hildegard's illuminations have found their way into the public eye through handsome reproductions. Matthew Fox's book *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen* commanded attention because of those arresting illuminations. Matthew Fox, with his reputation as a scholar and an advocate for holistic spirituality, added credence to Hildegard as someone who could speak to our time. The medieval

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<sup>118</sup> Story used with Susan's permission.



literary scholar Peter Dronke did the same with her poetry and music.<sup>119</sup> Both put the weight of their reputations behind her writings so that interest in her gained strength, and further scholarship was done.

4. *Ecology and eco-justice*: The ecology movement found in her illuminations, and then in her writings, a cosmology that is resonant with that movement and a counter-weight to the world-view that invests humans with the right to exploit and destroy creatures and natural resources at will. The integrated symbolism of her illuminations has served to inform and inspire people who work for eco-justice. Thomas Berry, who called himself a geologian, often referred to Hildegard's words and illuminations.<sup>120</sup> Fr. Berry was a co-founder of the Green Mountain Monastery, an eco-theological foundation. Matthew Fox founded the Friends of Creation Spirituality.

5. *Holistic feminism*: In the face of misogyny, Hildegard claimed that the lives of her nuns had eternal value. Misogyny continues in our time. It may not have the legal standing it did in Hildegard's day, but a nonstop barrage of belittling women's contributions continues, shaming women who step out of "their place" and trivializing their presence. Hildegard provides an antidote for this poison by the sheer weight of her contribution, as well as by the medicine of her holistic world-view. The fact that she could live in a world of such poisonous attitudes towards women and still flourish is a word of hope for all who struggle against endemic oppression. People of our time have found in her writings healthy ways of being in a poisoned world.

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<sup>119</sup> For example: Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, 144-201.

<sup>120</sup> Irving Lazlo and Allan Combs, eds., *Thomas Berry, Dreamer of the Earth: the Spiritual Ecology of the Father of Environmentalism* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2011), 23-25.

*Two effects of this interest: movies and canonization*

Two results of the wide-spread interest are the production of movies about her and the Vatican's move to both canonize her and name her a Doctor of the Church.

There are at least two movies and a play<sup>121</sup> about Hildegard at this point. One movie, *Pioneers of the Spirit: Hildegard of Bingen* was produced in 1996. *Vision*, a far more lushly realized movie, was produced in 2010. Both movies are problematic for strict historic accuracy, but they get many central things right. Through the mediation of modern cinematography, a complex medieval woman is introduced to a modern audience in a way that is compelling. The movie makers did no worse than her own chosen hagiographers, and in *Visions* were able to highlight a very post-modern concern: power, which was *not* in the purview of her hagiographers.

All of this renewed interest enlivened the cause for her canonization as a Saint by the Vatican. Her biographies by her secretaries, Godfrey of Disibodenberg and Guibert of Gembloux, were written with her canonization in mind.<sup>122</sup> Certainly in her life-time she was considered to be holy and destined to sainthood. She was one of the first people to have their cause go through the formal process of canonization by the Vatican. Timing worked against her. Women Benedictines, especially those who transgressed or challenged the bounds of gender roles,<sup>123</sup> were not in fashion, not someone to be emulated. As a result, few women Benedictines found their way through the process to

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<sup>121</sup> A one-woman play, *Hildegard of Bingen and the Living Light*, by Linn Maxwell, written in 2009, has been produced in DVD format, Nov. 2012.

<sup>122</sup> Newman, "Sibyl of the Rhine," 4.

<sup>123</sup> While Hildegard was authorized to preach and teach men by no less than the Pope, that was indeed a gender role transgression, increasingly so over the following centuries.

canonization.<sup>124</sup> The cause stalled after four tries. Until recently. Finally, her cause was re-introduced and on May 10, 2012 she was canonized and on October 7, 2012, she was declared a Doctor of the Church.

### *Symbols and Symbolic Thought*

Humans gaze at the sunrise and feel hope, listen to music and feel connected, or smell cinnamon and ginger and remember holiday celebrations. These references evoke a symbolic relationship. The human brain is hardwired to symbolic thought, without any conscious effort on our part.<sup>125</sup> Dreams, the power of story-telling, and the manipulations of the advertising industry all witness to the power of symbols. Like a stealth bomber flying without being able to be detected by radar, symbols are engaged by the psyche, unable to be disarmed by argument. Once a symbol is “heard” it cannot be just dismissed, as can discursive argument. It cannot be lost, because the symbol is embedded in the subconscious. When it speaks a truth, it cannot be dismissed, except by extreme psychological violence to oneself.

Symbols are the language of the psyche, an impulse of behavior, and an inner guide for the direction thought and action can take.<sup>126</sup> Symbols function as non-discursive language; symbols use a different form of “reason” which is not subject to rational argument. We use symbols all the time; even language itself is symbolic. For example, when we say “apple” an apple does not fall from the mouth. We make a sound and those who speak our same language understand what that sound references.

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<sup>124</sup> Newman, “Sibyl of the Rhine,” 29.

<sup>125</sup> Geary, *I Is An Other*, 79-80, 96.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

Language itself is full of metaphor; no one needs further description when we say “I’m fired up” or “I’m under water.”

Symbols have the power not only to influence what we perceive but also how we interpret what we perceive.<sup>127</sup> Symbols speak to us in the deep preconscious parts of our psyche, who-we-are.<sup>128</sup> Symbols arise, seemingly all by themselves, as we discourse spirituality. By their very nature, symbols are multivalent: they say and unsay, they convey diverse and contradictory meanings, they evoke responses that words cannot convey. Symbols have power, whether the symbol is an image, a myth, a harmonic progression, a dance, a speech rhythm, an architectural form, or anything else that evokes a response from our psyche. They have power to inform, form, and change us.

Why symbols? Because symbols do not work on the level of discursive reasoning; they cannot be rationalized away. Specific symbols carry both a preconscious generalized meaning and our own experiences. As such, symbols are both universal and particular. The symbol water carries meanings as far back in our experience as the amniotic fluid in which we swam before birth. Water quenches our thirst, soothes our fever, carries us downstream, threatens to drown us. The symbols can evoke cleansing, birth, or death. Each of these meanings resonates with our own experiences, evokes metaphors resonating with multiple layers of meaning; that is, symbols are multivalent. Different people respond with their own experiences, their own engagement with the metaphor, their own resonances. Each symbol resonates with other symbols, other

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<sup>127</sup> Geary, *I Is An Other*, 96, 113-115, 120.

<sup>128</sup> Karl Jung, *Symbols of Transformation: an Analysis of the Prelude to a Case of Schizophrenia*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 77, 309-310.

experiences.<sup>129</sup> And each of those evocations brings with it other associations, other symbols to make symbol clusters. As these resonances inform the subconscious, the subconscious informs how a person perceives and responds to the symbols.

As soon as I began work on Hildegard, I was aware of the power of her use of symbols. The psychological and pedagogical expertise exhibited by Hildegard is nothing short of masterful. Because Hildegard used symbols, she is able to speak immediately to us, through distance of time and culture, and evoke within us an authentic response for our time. Her use of symbols opens ways of thinking about how we talk about the cosmos, how we can play with symbols in our own journey, how symbols effect change. Hildegard's symbols are original, fresh and engaging, stimulate the senses and the imagination, and carry many layers of meaning and reference.

While the subject matter of her illuminations and writings are resonant with current interest in ecology, herbal medicine, justice, and feminism, it is her use of symbols- not just the choice of symbols but *how* she uses them- that resonates with me as a spiritual counselor. Neuroscience and behavioral science are learning more and more about how the brain functions, how symbols interact with our minds, and how real change in behavior takes place. It is here that I take comfort from one who has gone before in the faith. Hildegard looked honestly and long into the complex world, the wounded soul, the journey into spiritual growth and wholeness. As a true shaman she entered the Spirit World, and came back to her community with medicine for healing.

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<sup>129</sup> See Appendix 2: Connections B: Blue as Compassion.

Hildegard's visionary illustrations speak to many challenges that we face today. The cosmos-egg reveals the cosmos as an interconnection of the material and spiritual. It does so through a visual symbol, an entry point into theological reflection that, while it contains didactic thought and even science, engages the psyche on a different level, the pre-conscious. The symbolic engagement within the psyche makes her work compelling and an effective agent of change. It is through symbols that Hildegard teaches the relationships, the healthy relationality that is relevant for today.

Paradigms are a form of symbol.<sup>130</sup> Paradigms are the building blocks of how we make sense of the world and our place in it. They are foundational for our personal self-knowledge. They are expressed in our culture and through “what everyone knows,” our unexamined assumptions. We may be able to use language to discuss paradigms, but paradigms are inevitably grounded in symbolic thought. Paradigm shifts are shifts in foundational thinking, and, as such, terrifying because the shift causes doubt about our perception of reality itself. For example, our culture has had a patriarchal hierarchical paradigm for millennia, though alternative paradigms have been present. Christianity itself carries Jesus' own egalitarian “family” paradigm<sup>131</sup> as did traditional Celtic, Nordic and other Northern European clan-based culture's religion.<sup>132</sup> The cult of the Virgin

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<sup>130</sup> Our current societal use of the word paradigm comes from Thomas S. Kuhn in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1962).

<sup>131</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome Then and Now* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), 158-160. However: cf. J. H. Elliott, “The Jesus Movement was not Egalitarian but Family-oriented,” *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches* 11, no. 2 (2003): 173-210.

<sup>132</sup> Thomas Cahill *Mysteries of the Middle Ages: and the Beginnings of the Modern World* (New York: Random House, 2008), 119. Cf. Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role, from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 86-87, 172-174.

Mother, especially the Black Virgin, also carries matriarchal resonances.<sup>133</sup> These paradigms challenge the basic premise of patriarchy and hierarchy. Western culture has seen these alternative paradigms as counter-cultural at best, heresy and apostasy at worst. In the past century feminist ethics<sup>134</sup> and ecology<sup>135</sup> have called patriarchy and hierarchy into question. The push back to both feminist ethics and ecology has come from the hierarchical paradigm, the refusal to acknowledge an egalitarian interconnective paradigm. Western Culture remains a hierarchical culture, and interconnectivity is denied by many conservatives as a basic premise for ethical and political decisions.<sup>136</sup> Since this is a problem with foundational symbols, rather than rational decision-making, it is no wonder that progress has been elusive in such areas as human rights, gender, ecology, sustainable agriculture, and building healthy urban community. On a personal level, one feels the impact of the questions of self-worth, relations with others, authority, the materiality of the body, and how one relates to the spiritual and material cosmos. Without a paradigm shift, consciousness cannot shift, and behavior cannot shift. Since the paradigm is a symbol, with a symbol's hold on one's self-understanding, it can only be truly shifted through other symbols.

Therefore we need to be very careful in our choice of symbols and how we use the symbols. We need to ask ourselves and those we counsel: What does this symbol evoke for you? What meanings does it carry? How do you use that symbol in your own

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<sup>133</sup> Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: the Myth of the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 45-47.

<sup>134</sup> For example: Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 28-30, 214-216, 237.

<sup>135</sup> For example: Shiva, *Staying Alive*, xvii.

<sup>136</sup> Dionne, *Our Divided Political Heart*, 118-119.

soul-work? How is someone else using the symbol in their relationship with you? How do you feel when this symbol is evoked? These questions can get us past the intellectual, conscious discussion and bring us into the discussion that is healing for the soul, the inner dance of the spiritual life. And in so doing, the questions can help in bringing us and our directees into a healthy spirituality and healthy spiritual practice.

Paradigm changes are notoriously difficult to accomplish. But paradigms have changed before. The question is how to teach this new one. I believe that using symbols is a powerful tool in this endeavor. I also believe that we don't have to re-invent the wheel. There are core beliefs, encoded in symbols within Christianity, indeed within most cultures and religions, which can be activated. These core symbols can be called upon to aid in this paradigm shift.

Both the subconscious and the imagination enable our minds to have one sign refer to another sign, to another, and so on, so that meaning is carried like a water skier over waves and wakes, like a slalom racer both propelled and tossed by the icy course. This symbolic slippage is one of Hildegard's primary rhetorical devices.

### *Aesthetic Theologian*

Aesthetic theology is primary theology.<sup>137</sup> *Lex orandi, lex credendi*, literally: the law of praying is the law of believing. The old Latin saying points to an experiential truth, that we start our theology through experience, including our experience of worship, our senses, our symbolic thought. Only after we have worshipped and taken in the

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<sup>137</sup> Richard D. McCall, *Do This: Liturgy as Performance* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2007), 73. Aesthetic theology is experiential, based on knowing through the senses. This includes knowledge gained through liturgy, the arts, and through beauty. It is primary theology because a person first experiences, and then describes what has been experienced. Discursive and speculative theologies are therefore secondary theologies.



symbols (music, rhythm, architecture, poetry, movement) do we actually begin to describe what that experience means, our theology. Aesthetic theology is doing theology through symbols. That is what Hildegard is doing with her symbols; she is participating in aesthetic theology.

Since Hildegard's visions are not enmeshed in a patriarchal dualist world-view, as evidenced by her visions, she is free to make observations and connections that challenge our ways of thinking. She is free to use methods and images that not only rose out of her culture and learning, but also out of her rich symbolic imagination. As such, these methods and images are not bound to a world view of distant ages past, but can connect with our symbolic imaginations.

I live in an increasingly culturally and religiously diverse milieu, so I need to find ways to have meaningful conversation with those who come from other traditions. And as a Christian it is more honest for me to speak from my Christian tradition. Both/and. When I was considering which symbol might support healthy spirituality, what a delight it was to find that the new paradigm is, in fact, a very old paradigm, one that can speak across cultures and religions. That paradigm is the cosmos as a unity, interconnected in materiality and in spirit. That paradigm was old when Hildegard used it. She supports that paradigm with a treasure-trove of symbols- verbal, visual, and auditory. It is from this treasure trove that I have chosen the symbol *viriditas*, greenness, present in all her writings, and one whose roots are held in common throughout the world. In engaging with the symbol, aesthetic theology becomes a tool in the workshop of the spiritual counselor.

## Chapter 3

### *Viriditas: Greenness*

O most noble, greening, creative force,  
Who are rooted in sunlight,  
And who in their radiant serenity shine like a wheel of lights;  
No earthy power can ever fully comprehend such excellence,  
You are closely held in warm embrace by the Mystery of the Divine One.  
You blush like the dawn twilight,  
And burn like the flaming sunshine.<sup>138</sup>

In Chapter 1, five particular areas of concern for healthy spirituality were identified. They are *alienations from self, of authority, from materiality, from empathy either for oneself or for others suffering, and from others*. One symbol that addresses these areas of concern is the symbol *viriditas*: greenness. *Viriditas* is central to Hildegard's theology and spirituality. In this chapter I will first describe what *viriditas* means for her and how she used it in her moral theology teaching, showing how the holistic understanding intersects with healthy spirituality. I will then suggest how this symbol can be a healing paradigm shift. In the following chapter on retreats I will suggest how it can be used in the retreat to teach healthy spirituality.

#### *St. Disibod, Hildegard at Disibodenberg, and Viriditas*

The legend of St. Disibod tells of the elderly Celtic monk. After many, many years of missionary travels, he asked of God a sign of where he should build his monastery. On the hill above the confluence of the Glan and Nahe Rivers, as he prepared

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<sup>138</sup> *Antiphon: To Virgins and Innocents*, trans. June Boyce-Tillman, in June Boyce-Tillman, *Singing the Mystery: 28 Liturgical Pieces of Hildegard of Bingen* (London: Hildegard Press and Association for Inclusive Language, 1994), quoted in June Boyce-Tillman, *The Creative Spirit: Harmonious Living with Hildegard of Bingen* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2001), 7.

to kneel to pray, he stuck his walking stick into the ground. Immediately the staff started sprouting green.<sup>139</sup> A white deer came out of the woods and grazed where a spring of clear water rippled through the grass.<sup>140</sup> Disibod stood up and exclaimed: "This is the holy place, let us build our huts here!" It was to this monastery site that Hildegard was sent as a child oblate. She had but to look at her own apothecary garden to witness the vivifying quality of light, moisture, and fecundity. She had but to look at the forests, pastures, and meadows surrounding her monastery to see greenness.

Hildegard lived near the verdant rolling hills and wide meadows of the Nahe River valley. Bingen, where she was born and where she established her first monastery, is at the confluence of the Nahe and Rhine Rivers. Nearby is the forest of the Binger Wald, a low mountain range, separating the Nahe valley from the equally fecund Moselle River valley to the north. Disibodenberg is upriver and to the west of Bingen. It is out of this green world, with the equally bleak landscape of winter, that Hildegard took in the scientific and spiritual understanding of greenness.

The word *viriditas* literally means "greenness". Greenness, *viriditas*, evokes the verdant pasture, fountains, living plants. The greenness of leaves can only happen when the leaves are exposed to light, for it is light that allows the photosynthesis to take place in the chlorophyll.<sup>141</sup> This greenness is also a sign that the roots are able to draw in the moisture *and* the needed nutrients. Greenness is the outward and visible sign of an

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<sup>139</sup> In Latin, staff is *virga*; green (fresh, youthful) is *viridis*. Through sound similarities (slippage), this evokes *virgo* (virgin) and *virago* (war-like, heroic woman). The image of the Virgin Mary as the fresh stem from the root of Jesse and Jesus as the rose blossom comes from these symbolic associations.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Ps. 42:1. "As the hart pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God."

<sup>141</sup> William Bridgewater and Seymour Kurtz, eds., *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), s.v. "photosynthesis."

inward and invisible process. Hildegard uses the symbol to connect everyday experience in materiality to talk about something spiritual. She connects the image of greenness- a sign that a plant is alive- with images of natural phenomena which make this life possible- the fiery light of the sun, air, wind.

“I, the fiery life of the divine essence, am aflame beyond the beauty of the meadows, I gleam in the waters, and I burn in sun, moon, and stars. With every breeze, as with invisible life that contains everything, I awaken everything to life.... For I am life.”<sup>142</sup>

*Viriditas* is the spark that kindles life, *igneus vis*. The *evidence* of life- greenness- becomes the symbol of the *cause* of life.<sup>143</sup> The fountain-like presence and workings of the Holy Spirit tie *viriditas* and grace.<sup>144</sup> *Viriditas* can then be understood as a metaphor for grace, as long as grace is understood as the foundational condition for creation as well as for salvation and holiness.

While other medieval authors<sup>145</sup> had used the word *viriditas*, it is central to Hildegard’s symbolic world-view. In her theological cosmology, *viriditas* is the effect of the presence of the Holy Spirit. She often pairs the word *viriditas* with the Holy Spirit, as

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<sup>142</sup> BDW I. 2. See Appendix 1: B for a more complete quote.

<sup>143</sup> *ego ignea vita substantie divinitati*. BDW I. 2. As with all virtues, which are attributes of God, it is hard to describe the dividing lines between the substance of God, the activity of God, and the soul’s cooperation with that activity.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. Rev. 22: 1, the confluence of light and the water of life flowing from God, “Then (the angel) showed me the river of the water of life; bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and from the Lamb.”

<sup>145</sup> A search in the online *Patrologia Latina* shows hundreds of medieval uses of the word. St. Gregory the Great (6th century), in *Moralia in Job*, is a likely source for Hildegard. Constant Mews, “Religious Thinker: ‘Frail Human Being’ on Fiery Life” in *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World*, ed. Barbara Newman (Berkeley: University of California Press), 58. For a detailed study of this, see Jeanette Jones, “A Theological Interpretation of ‘Viriditas’ in Hildegard of Bingen and Gregory the Great,” *Boston University Portfolio of the Department of Musicology and Ethnomusicology* 1 (2012), <http://www.bu.edu/pdme/jeannette-jones/> (accessed Jan. 15, 2013).

in “*viriditatis Spiritus Sancti*.”<sup>146</sup> Like the virtues, which connect divine attributes to the human soul, it is hard to say where the presence of the Holy Spirit differentiates from the effects of that presence.

“These same virtues (Divine Love, Humility, Peace) cannot be separated from the divinity, as a root cannot be cut away from its tree. For God is Love (*Deus caritas existens*) in all of his works, and holds to humility in all of his judgments. Divine Love and Humility came down to earth with the Son of God and led him back as he returned to heaven.”<sup>147</sup>

In its spiritual activity, *viriditas* is the location of holiness and wholeness. In its material activity, *viriditas* is the location of the vivification in cosmos. Through *viriditas*, the material order works together for life, including planets and stars, herbs and insects, and the various organs in the human body. Macrocosmos/microcosmos and the four elements are expressions of the foundational *viriditatis Spiritus Sancti*.

“With my mouth,” God says, “I kiss my own chosen creation. I uniquely, lovingly, embrace every image I have made out of the earth’s clay. With a fiery spirit I transform it into a body to serve all the world.”<sup>148</sup>

The Holy Spirit’s presence is expressed in *viriditas* in several discernable and intertwined arenas: creation/environment and the human body,<sup>149</sup> God’s salvation through Jesus Christ, the life of the Church, the sanctification of the soul, and New Creation. In

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<sup>146</sup> Sermon 26. Appendix 3.

<sup>147</sup> *Liber Divinorum Operum*, ed. A. Derolez and P. Dronke, translated from the critical edition of Hildegard’s *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Medievalis* 92 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), III.3, quoted in Nathaniel M. Campbell, “Caritas, Humilitas, and Pax: Theophany of the Fountain in St. Hildegard of Bingen’s *Liber Divinorum Operum* III.3,” *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, posted Oct. 5, 2012, <http://nathaniel-campbell.blogspot.com/2012/10/hildegard-of-bingen-liber-divinorum-operum-III-3.html> (accessed Jan. 15, 2013). Cf. *BDW* VIII. 3.

<sup>148</sup> Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Bear and Company, 1983), 184. Cf. Heinrich Schipperges and John Cumming, *The World of Hildegard of Bingen: Her Life, Time, and Visions* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 103.

<sup>149</sup> For instance, *viriditas* operates in the human body in its metabolism, its sensitivity to the influences of constellations during particular times of the month and of the year: *BDW* IV. Cf. Renate Craine, *Hildegard: Prophet of the Cosmic Christ* (NY: The Crossroad Publishing Co. 1998), 75.

Hildegard's theology, the Holy Spirit is intimately involved in materiality *and* sanctification. She taught that physicality and spirituality are both blessed, one expressing the other.

### *Viriditas as Moral Theology*

As the context of virtue, *viriditas* expresses goodness and justice which are moral categories. Moral theology (tropology) has both personal and societal dimensions. *Viriditas* is opposed to *ariditas*, the desert, brown, dead plants, barren, dry, and brittle. In using the symbol *viriditas*, Hildegard contrasts the verdant pastures where the soul is nourished with the arid desert of sin.<sup>150</sup>

“If we surrender the green vitality of these virtues and surrender to the drought of our indolence, so that we lack the sap of life and the greening power of good deeds, then the power of our very soul will begin to fade away and dry up”<sup>151</sup>

A decline in *viriditas* and increase of *ariditas* signals sin, especially evident in injustice. Justice and injustice have a wide meaning for Hildegard. Hildegard uses *viriditas* to metaphorically express the wholesomeness of a just society.<sup>152</sup> She writes passionately and eloquently on behalf of societal justice.<sup>153</sup> As Matthew Fox writes of her thought, “Injustice is the cause of sin because injustice is the ultimate dryness.”<sup>154</sup>

Sin and evil produce aridity, and aridity produces sin and evil. Because everything is within the web of relationality, the consequences of sin, evil, and aridity

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<sup>150</sup> Dryness, in Hildegard's sense, is not to be confused with heat. They are two of the four humors, needing to be in balance. The dryness she is talking about is the dryness of lifelessness. Indeed, the fire within creation is associated with Holy Spirit “...a gentle glowing fire, which fire without any flaw of aridity, mortality or darkness...” (*Scivias* II. 2.)

<sup>151</sup> *BDW* II. 18.

<sup>152</sup> I am reminded of the late medieval murals in Siena Government building, “Good Government” and “Bad Government”. See Appendix 2: Connections D.

<sup>153</sup> *BDW* X. 8, 16. *Scivias* 3. 1-7.

<sup>154</sup> Fox, *Illuminations*, 64.

touch the material plane as much as the spiritual plan. It is, after all, a single unified cosmos. Hildegard laments the consequences of the loss of *viriditas*.

“Now in the people that were meant to be green there is no more life of any kind. There is only shriveled barrenness. The winds are burdened by the utterly awful stink of evil, selfish goings-on. Thunderstorms menace. The air belches out the filthy uncleanness of the peoples. The earth should not be injured! The earth must not be destroyed!”<sup>155</sup>

Therefore, not only are humans subject to a world of danger, chance, and evil, they themselves, through sin, create the conditions in which they and other creatures suffer. For this, Hildegard does call humans into accountability. For sin and evil, she does call for repentance, restitution, and conversion of life. And it is through *viriditas Spiritus Sancte* that this is possible. Through *viriditas*, all creatures participate in the cosmic *symphonia*- in interrelational web of the cosmos, spiritual and material.<sup>156</sup> The creatures’ ethical interaction with *viriditas* and *ariditas* becomes the field of justice. “The high, the low, all of creation God gives to humankind to use. If this privilege is misused, God’s justice permits creation to punish humanity.”<sup>157</sup> Personal *and* societal ethics have an impact, for good or for ill, not only on the soul, but on the community, the social fiber, and on the natural world in which we dwell.

She connects the ethics of “right relationship” with the spiritual and physical wellbeing of her nuns. It is in this context that Hildegard uses the word *viriditas* when she is metaphorically discussing asceticism. Cultivating virtues is the place where God’s grace intersects with spiritual growth and wholesomeness, vice disconnects them.

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<sup>155</sup> Uhlein, *Meditations*, 77-78.

<sup>156</sup> Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, *Fundamentals of Music*, trans. Calvin M. Bower (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 1-2.

<sup>157</sup> Uhlein, *Meditations*, 80. Cf. *BDW* III. 2.

“(Grace) becomes now wider and now narrower; for to the miserable and weeping hearts of the faithful Grace comes in great abundance and fruitfulness, while in the profligate and hard minds of sinners it (grace) often contracts itself to a trickle because of their aridity.”<sup>158</sup>

Hildegard understood that the negative exercise of eliminating vice was, in itself, counter-productive. Comparing the soul to a field that has been subject to unseasonable and damaging downpours, she writes:

“It’s the same for a person who lays on herself more strain than her body can endure. This is a sign that the effects of holy discretion are weak in such a person. And all of this immoderate straining and abstinence bring nothing of use to such a soul...Such a person lives then without hope and without joy. It’s not unusual for her zest for life to disappear and she will be seized with heavy illness.”<sup>159</sup>

Hildegard taught that while mortification- denying fleshly desires, comforts, and pleasures- had its place, especially in the monastic asceticism, the vacuum of lack sucked in more evil, not less. In this, she is in accord with modern psychology and neuroscience, as well as her own Benedictine tradition. Extreme mortification practices, such as excessive self-flagellation and fasting to the point of starvation, were not part of the Benedictine tradition. In fact, they were highly suspect, marking someone as seeking “singularity,” not a virtue when community is the goal.

As *magistra*, Hildegard was responsible for creating in her monastery a milieu that encouraged the desire for moral development. In her books, songs, and sermons she laid down the conditions that support this development. She, and indeed most medieval moral theologians, taught: fill life with virtue and prayer; God works grace through the

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<sup>158</sup> *Scivias* III. 8.

<sup>159</sup> *BDW*, “Letter to Elisabeth of Schongau,” 341.



virtues that the soul might live. It is a positive message, full of assurance of God's blessing and desire for the good of the soul.

### ***Journey of the Soul: Ordo Virtutum***

Her morality opera, *Ordo Virtutum*<sup>160</sup> is a metaphorical psychodrama which enacts the work of virtues in helping the soul (*anima*) overcoming evil. The virtues are personified, each given their own voice and task.<sup>161</sup> *Anima*, the personified human soul, laments the hollowness of life without God, and in honesty admits sin and human frailty; the Virtues step forward to fill the soul. Rather than asceticism as a practice of self-abasement and physical self-wounding, asceticism is seen primarily as the practice of virtue.

Hildegard has sixteen virtues populating her *Ordo Virtutum*; each one of them is a powerful ally for *Anima*. The *Ordo Virtutum* is her clearest statement about how the soul goes from separation from God to a salvific relationship with God. The soul is distressed by her "dress" (material flesh), but the virtues remind her that she has that dress from the Creator. *Anima* is awake and aware of the chasm between her and God because of sin.

Materiality begins with original blessing "In the beginning all creation was verdant, flowers blossomed in the midst of it..." Then the consequence of sin is named: "later, greenness faded away."<sup>162</sup> There is nothing inherently evil in the flesh and

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<sup>160</sup> There are two versions of this play. One, a shorter version, concludes her first published book, *Scivias*. The other longer version is the opera by that name, *Ordo Virtutum*. All quotes from the opera are from Peter Dronke's translation (1981 and 1987), <http://www.oxfordgirlschoir.co.uk/hildegard/ordovirtutumtext.html> (accessed April 4, 2013).

<sup>161</sup> *Virtutum*: literally: strength/power; courage/bravery; worth/manliness/virtue/character, excellence; army; host; mighty works (pl.); related to vir: male (virile) man; husband; hero; person of courage, honor, and nobility.

<sup>162</sup> *In principio omnes creature viruerunt, in medio flores floruerunt; postea viriditas descendit.* This is actually found in the final chorus of the opera, but acts as a recapitulation for the play as a whole, a summation of the action, and a call to living out the holy life as demonstrated in this exemplar.

materiality, only in its misuse. The real evil comes from sin, primarily the pride of the devil. The soul asks the virtue Humility for healing from the pride that has wounded her. Through humility, the soul is given the skill<sup>163</sup> to overcome evil. The human soul repents the breach of that relationship and incorporates the virtues; the wound begins to heal through the “medicine” of the virtues. The virtues give the soul the tools to overcome evil. The wounds the soul has experienced through sin become incorporated in the wounds that Christ suffered for salvation. God sees them as one. Christ is shown as saying “Father, behold, I am showing you my wounds.” And those who witness the opera are admonished by the chorus “So now, all you people, bend your knees to the Father, that he may reach you his hand.”

### *Viriditas in the Parable of the Prodigal Son/Creation Myth*

The narrative flow that is shown in *Anima*’s journey is also in the sermons which use the word *viriditas*.<sup>164</sup> First, there is an allusion to good God creating a good creation. The cosmic fall<sup>165</sup> from that relationship is acknowledged. Adam is Everyhuman,<sup>166</sup> always the type of the human being, the human soul. Christ is the archetype for Everyhuman and takes upon himself the both the materiality and the sin, transforming them. Through the Spirit of adoption and grace,<sup>167</sup> the Father sees Everyhuman as Christ. The human soul, through the process of awareness, honesty, repentance, begins the

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<sup>163</sup> Literally: “and I will nurture you so that you will find” (*enutriam vos ad requirendam*)

<sup>164</sup> Kienzle, *Hildegard of Bingen and her Gospel Homilies*, 170-193.

<sup>165</sup> This is one of her uses of the symbol whirlwind. Multivalent, the symbol also contains the prospect of conversion, but also of confusion and chaos.

<sup>166</sup> Adam, as type in this symbolic narrative flow, is not gendered by Hildegard. She is speaking to her nuns about their spiritual journey. Therefore it is closer to her meaning to translate *homo* as human, and consider Adam the type for humanity. Indeed, she herself often chooses words that more closely relate to this non-gendered language concerning Adam. Kienzle, *Hildegard of Bingen and her Gospel Homilies*, 270.

<sup>167</sup> Eph. 1:5; Romans 8:15. Cf. Third Collect for Christmas Day, *BCP*, 213.

process of healing, based on the prevenient grace<sup>168</sup> *viriditas*. Practice of the virtues is the human's way of cooperating with that grace.<sup>169</sup> Then, when the Father sees the wounded soul, God recognizes that soul as a wounded member of the body of his Son.

Hildegard placed *viriditas* in a complex symbol cluster which includes pasture (*pastus*, *pascua*), feeding (*pasco*, *depasco*), *paschua* (including the paschal lamb),<sup>170</sup> Adam, moisture/clouds/fountains, light, New Jerusalem (New Creation). The sermon may also include whirlwind, *ariditas*, sacrifice, feast, Christ's wounds, jewels, and metaphoric virtues. Her nuns would already be sensitive to the symbol clusters and resonances from their own readings, constantly hearing the Bible, and from Hildegard's other writings.

One example of this flow is Sermon 26.<sup>171</sup> The text for Sermon 26 is the Parable of the Prodigal Son. That sermon places on parallel tracks Jesus' parable and the story of creation as found in the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis, from the Creation through the Fall. One biblical story evokes the other, not by subject matter, but by metaphor. The actors and objects in one story personify the actors and objects in the other story, and that takes on symbolic resonance within the salvation narrative that arcs the Bible, typology informing tropology. The landowner signifies God; the pasture signifies creation at its beginning, before sin. Hildegard evokes the origin of Creation; she brings forward this act of creating as expressing God's intention of blessing, love, and relationship with creation. The eldest brother signifies the angels and the younger brother humanity, the type Adam. The Fall

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<sup>168</sup> The words "prevenient grace" have a post-Reformation history, and, as far as I know, are not a medieval construct. However, without imposing on them the modern technical weight of meaning, the words themselves do describe what Hildegard teaches, the grace that "comes before."

<sup>169</sup> On choice (free will) see *BDW* X: 4, "The flame of reason, however, knew that it was to act through the kiss of choice."

<sup>170</sup> *Pasco* is Latin, *Paschua* is Hebrew. Though not etymologically related, the symbolic slippage due to sound and meaning similarity is inevitable and rich in symbolic resonances.

<sup>171</sup> See Appendix 3 for my translation of Sermon 26.

parallels the younger brother's separation from the Father "to a far off land." And so throughout the sermon, the parallel continues between the Fall myth and the parable. Each phrase, each step of the way, Hildegard reinforces the metaphors to make visible that this is a psychodrama of the Everyhuman moral struggle, a process that takes place within the context of God's prevenient love, and the human's awakening to his/her true identity as a child of God. Hildegard makes plain that it is by the sacrificial death of Christ (the fatted calf) that there is a feast, that the feast is the eschatological New Creation, and that the feast is the being joyous together in the greenness of the Holy Spirit (*congratulatione uiriditatis Spiritus Sancti*). Hildegard is interpreting the parable within the tropological method of biblical exegesis. She is not treating it as a simple parable but an extended opera, filled with complex theology and symbol clusters. The story begins in the greenness of blessed creation (verdant pasture) and concludes with the greenness of New Creation.

### ***A Holistic Ascesis***

Hildegard first establishes goodness in creation; "God is the good and all things which proceed from him are good."<sup>172</sup> Hildegard places human existence as existentially positive, asserting the primacy of God's loving relationship with us and with all of creation. While never underestimating the power of evil or humans' capacity to do evil, she places the focus on good as the way to overcome evil, and highlighting the activity of the Holy Spirit as the source of good in the human. Rather than starting with human's sin of pride, and with efforts to mortify the flesh, she starts with God's loving relationship with humanity. That relationship is already in every breath we take, in our "moist"

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<sup>172</sup> Fox, *Original Blessing*, 42. Fox quotes Hildegard without citing source. In *BDWI* 1-2, the interconnectedness between God and creation is shown to be *viriditas*, which connects Gen. 1 and therefore to Gen. 3, "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good."

bodies, in the goodness of what our senses experience. That relationship is already sanctified in Christ and flows through sacraments, music, and prayers; it flows through acts of mercy and kindness towards each other and through all the virtues.

What is the difference between this and other asceticism? In what way is this healthy and holistic? How can this asceticism help to heal those who have suffered from other asceticism? In my experience, I have noticed that anxiety is counter-productive. Those who grow spiritually are those who have trust. Somehow they have incorporated within their innermost being the idea that God's primary relationship with them is loving compassion. Amazingly, I have seen this even in those who were abused as children, who have no "reason" to trust anyone, let alone a God that allowed that abuse to happen.

*"Trust shows the way."*<sup>173</sup>

When I was a hospital chaplain specializing in mental health, I would visit patients, go to Grief and Anger Groups and Art Therapy Groups, and bring my harp to play solo and to lead a sing-along, during which the patients could try out the harp, feel the vibrations. I also encouraged the patients to engage in the arts. I reminded them that they are created in the image of the creator God; being creative and making music was a way to claim their birthright.

I visited a patient<sup>174</sup> who had had repeated hospitalizations, who was feeling hopeless and worthless. Over a couple of years and several admissions, we were able to have deep conversations. She was deeply ashamed of her illness and yet was tenderly

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<sup>173</sup> Fox, *Original Blessing*, 81. Fox quotes Hildegard without citing the source.

<sup>174</sup> This took place at a teaching hospital, Fletcher Allen Health Care, Burlington, VT, where the patients agree that their stories might be used for educational purposes.

knowledgeable that God loved her, no matter what, and cared what happened to her.

While her particular symptoms which included clinical depression, suicidal ideation, and episodes of disassociation were congruent with someone who had been sexually abused as a child, abuse was not part of her medical records. During one of the Grief and Anger Group a couple of other patients had talked about their abuse as children. Then she spoke in the voice and language of a young child that a breach of trust should never happen to any child. As far as the staff knew, that was the first time she had an alter personality emerge, the silenced sexually abused young child. From that “safe” place of sympathy for others, she was able for the first time to have her own experience begin to surface. The injustice of breach of trust for others allowed her to begin to feel the injustice for herself. Healing could and did begin.

Some weeks later, when she was preparing to be discharged, we had another conversation. She told me that for the first time she felt hope at the time of discharge, and thanked me for my work with her through music, prayer, and, through our conversations, securing for her the opportunity to live into her relationship with a God whose first relationship with her was love and compassion, not anger and judgment, not shame and blame. Because of our time together, she had reconnected with her music and her faith community; she felt both would provide her with the needed spiritual and emotional support to continue the hard work of therapy. She knew that re-admittance to the hospital was always a possibility, but she also knew she was on a journey in healing. A terrible discontinuity in “the way things should be/the way things are” had been negotiated. People she loved, trusted, and needed for survival had abused her. There

should be justice, and creation is beautiful/there is injustice, illness and death in the fabric of the cosmos. And underneath are the everlasting arms of God.<sup>175</sup> Both/and.

### *Freedoms arriving from Viriditas*

Reflecting on the values that surfaced in the analysis of *viriditas*, I became aware of freedoms that are a consequence of the paradigm shift. It will not come as a surprise to anyone who has done counseling that these freedoms do not have a one to one correspondence with particular alienations but intersect with more than one. It is not surprising because the work is multi-dimensional and interconnected, touching the spiritual, the psychological, the emotional and the physical.<sup>176</sup> These freedoms are:

#### *1.) Freedom from need to prove worthiness, lovability*

Hildegard's holistic ascesis does *not* start with the total unworthiness of the person or God's angry judgment.<sup>177</sup> It starts with greenness, verdant life as the "origin", the starting point. It starts with God's primary relationship with creation as love: and "Limitless love, from the depths to the stars; flooding all, loving all. It is the royal kiss of peace."<sup>178</sup> The particular human soul is born into a world already infested with sin, and God understands this. God has already provided for the healing of the soul: the Father has already sent his Son, Christ has already created salvation; the Holy Spirit has already

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<sup>175</sup> Deut. 33:27. "The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

<sup>176</sup> A common metaphor for spiritual work is the spiral; another is peeling an onion- remove one layer and you reveal another underneath.

<sup>177</sup> Which is not to say that Hildegard never reveals an "angry" or "jealous" God. She does, but the "anger" and "jealousy" are not revealed as emotion, but an ethical response, like a just and measured judge in a court of law. See *Scivias* III 5.

<sup>178</sup> Uhlein, *Meditations*, 51-52. Cf. *BDW* VIII is an extended symbolic meditation, Theophany of the Fountain, Appendix 1: Illumination I. Cf. *Caritas* (Trinity) Illuminations B and H.

established healing grace. God takes the burden off the soul. The impossible task of being “worthy” is moot.

This freedom from the need to be worthy is of immense psychological and spiritual importance. Our constructions of self, built in the first years of our lives and always fragile, are subject to our own primordial fears. The more moral a person is, the more they are subject to self-doubt. The more self-doubt, the greater the fear; the greater the fear, the less freedom to act. This great fear does not have the courage to love and to accept love. Feeling unlovable, the person cannot believe that they are loved. Stepping out into a trusting relationship with anyone, let alone God, is perceived as too risky. One’s feelings of self-worth are felt to be too fragile to risk rejection, shame, humiliation. Hildegard’s relational *viriditas* gives grounds for existential trust.

## 2.) *Freedom from Shame*

Anti-materialist dualism teaches that the body is shameful.<sup>179</sup> It teaches that the truly spiritual rise above their bodies by denying or ignoring them and by not paying attention to nature. When coupled with patriarchal hierarchy as taught by the church’s authorities,<sup>180</sup> women hear that their bodies are the ground of sin, the source of shame, the cause of suffering in the world. Men are taught that women’s bodies are to be feared. Men and women are taught that bodily fluids are contaminants, unholy. They hear that denying the flesh is the way to holiness, and that is accomplished through fasting, physical pain, and sexual abstinence. They feel their embodiment as essentially shameful.

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<sup>179</sup> Harrison, *Making the Connections*, 13.

<sup>180</sup> The use of the word “authorities” in this case is quite specific to the Catholic Church’s acknowledged *auctor*, *auctoritas*. I use the present tense because these *auctores* still have authority, still inform the teachings of the RC church and many other denominations.



In contrast, Hildegard teaches, “Holy persons draw to themselves all that is earthly.”<sup>181</sup> When *Anima* in the *Ordo Virtutum* is distressed with the “harsh weight” of the “dress of life “(flesh), the virtues remind her that flesh is created by God and was worn by the Savior, born of the flesh of Mary. *Viriditas* expresses God’s presence in materiality and moist women’s bodies.

### 3.) *Freedom from Fear-based Guilt*

Fear also causes guilt feelings. The mind begins to think “I am a sinful human, therefore I must have done sinful things,” and begins to imagine how that can be true. For someone seriously desiring a holy life, this can lead to scrupulousness, where every thought, word, and deed is suspect. This in turn can lead to timidity and even paralysis; one cannot act for fear of doing the wrong thing. Perfectionism walks hand in hand with compulsiveness. In a perverse way, it even causes the person to create reasons for guilt. As St. Paul attests, the more one struggles against something, the more compelling the thought becomes.<sup>182</sup> In contrast, *Viriditas* fills the soul with virtue so there is no vacuum to attract fear-based guilt.

### 4.) *Freedom from Self-destruction*

Equally, more someone tries to resist a thought, the more the brain thinks about it. The brain, thus primed, is more likely to steer the person in the direction of acting out the thought.<sup>183</sup> The more one tries to not think about a sin, the more the brain thinks about it, the stronger the temptation to sin. Though this principle has been known for millennia, it

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<sup>181</sup> Uhlein, *Meditations*, 64.

<sup>182</sup> Romans 7:15 “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.”

<sup>183</sup> Geary, *I Is an Other*, 96, 115.

seems somehow unworthy as a robust, virile spiritual ascesis. When the models for ascesis are athletes and soldiers, struggle and battle are seen as the way. Fighting *against* something is seen as the hero's task. From St. Paul to St. Bernard of Clairvaux and on, heroic ascetics have tried and failed. Many ruined their health in the process;<sup>184</sup> some went insane. In this self-defeating process, guilt piles upon guilt; there is no end to the reasons to feel guilty. Failure leads to guilt, and, just as likely, success leads to fear of pride, which leads to fear of success and fear of success almost always guarantees failure.

Into this cauldron of self-destruction, Hildegard teaches: salvation is *not* our task, it is God's.<sup>185</sup> Our task is to cooperate with the *viriditas* that is already being accomplished within us, through cultivating the virtues- a positive, not a negative. By not *emphasizing* pride and sinfulness, Hildegard side-steps the unhelpful process of dwelling on the negative. "Christ brings 'lush greenness' to 'shriveled and wilted people.'"<sup>186</sup> Her emphasis on *viriditas* and the verdant virtues is a holistic spiritual ascesis. That is not to say that Hildegard does not have much to say about sin, vice, evil, and corruption; she indeed had much to say about them. She certainly does elsewhere,<sup>187</sup> and it is engaged within the broad outline of the *viriditas/ariditas* paradigm. No further deconstruction of self is required to effect conversion.

That through this fountain of life came the embrace of God's maternal love, which nourishes us into life and is our help in perils, and is the deepest and sweetest charity and prepares us for penitence.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> For example, Bernard of Clairvaux's early austerities caused him life-long illness. Joseph Lynch, *The Medieval Church: a Brief History* (New York: Longman Group, 1992), 200.

<sup>185</sup> See above, page 34.

<sup>186</sup> Fox, *Illuminations*, 30.

<sup>187</sup> Particularly in her letters, the *Liber vitae meritorum*, and BDW X. 15-16.

<sup>188</sup> *Scivias* II 2. 4.

### 5.) *Freedom to be*

Those whose previous spiritual practice has led them to be centerless can claim their status as beloved creatures of God, existentially good because Creator God is good, existentially lovable because God who is Love, created them out of and for God's love. This is enormously freeing for anyone who was taught otherwise. For them, the anxiety of worthlessness creates, as it were, white noise so they cannot hear God's love, forgiveness, or desire for relationship. Their own inner desire for relationship, as shown by *Anima* in the *Ordo Virtutum*, can give them the courage to make the leap towards Love. As St. Augustine witnessed: "our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee."<sup>189</sup>

For Hildegard the key to creative flourishing is cultivating moderation and balance. The virtue of *discretio* is about discerning the right path, not being overburdened or overworked so that we are stretched too thin and joy is lost.<sup>190</sup>

These are the souls for whom I am most concerned. They have already been spiritually abused by social and cultural norms, and/or by religious leaders, and/or emotionally and physically abused by family members. Those engaged in their pastoral care need to assure them that that leap is psychologically, spiritually, and emotionally safe. In making the leap, the soul claims its own existence, its own right to that existence. Pride is not their primary sin, so they shouldn't be forced to claim something that is not their primary truth. If forced to do so by a convention, the foundation of their conversion is false. Trusting in *viriditas* is a more effective and much safer foundation.

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<sup>189</sup> *Fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te.* Confessions 1. 1.

<sup>190</sup> Christine Valters Paintner, "Holy Hildegard: a Spiritual Director Across Time," *Spiritual Directors International* (Oct. 5, 2012), <http://info.sdiworld.org/post/holy-hildegard-a-spiritual-director-across-time> (accessed Dec., 2012). *Discretio* means sound judgment, discernment.

### *Viriditas and Earth*

Through connecting *viriditas* with materiality and the fecundity of creatures, Hildegard underscores creation/cosmos as being a unity of materiality and spirit. Creatures are literally those things which God created. This for Hildegard includes stars, plants, and rocks, as well as animals. Their vivification is dependent upon the Holy Spirit's *viriditas* within them. In her illuminations, expositions, her writings on science and medicine, theology and pastoral care, Hildegard grounds her teaching in experiential knowledge, in what our senses can teach us.

### *Viriditas speaks to Healthy Spirituality*

We have already covered how detrimental unhealthy spirituality is. *Viriditas* brings us into a different paradigm, one that engenders healthy spirituality. The five specifically identified issues are alienations from self, of authority, from materiality, from empathy, and from community. While they are intertwined, for purposes of clarity we will address the particular manifestation of healthy spirituality in each.

1.) *Alienation from self, centerlessness*: The starting point of *viriditas* is creation as good, expressing the good Creator. *Viriditas* founds the cosmos. *Viriditas*, because it flows through all creation with infinite love and sustaining, does not express a hierarchy of merit or worth within creation. In *viriditas*, the hierarchy within creation is divorced from power or importance; hierarchy, as Hildegard understands it, is an expression of each creature's "task", their reason for being. Hildegard understands gender is not an expression of existential hierarchy, but an expression of the fiery and moist, life-

sustaining presence of *viriditas* in the fecundity of materiality.<sup>191</sup> The “normative” human is the human, holding equally Adam, Eve, and Jesus. In Hildegard’s writings, this archetype is without reference to gender; it is with reference to servanthood.<sup>192</sup> Hierarchical gendering of human psychological and physiological traits becomes irrelevant. Humility is seen as an antidote to a self-understanding that one is a monad, a singularity, self-centered, self-sufficient. Pride is then seen as a displacement of relationship and the cure is not a loss of personhood but a claiming of healthy mutuality. Suppression of self, which leads to centerlessness, is shown to be a cause of *ariditas* and suffering. *Viriditas* opens the gates of moist/fiery grace to the positive practice of virtues to fill the soul with nobility.

2.) *Alienation of authority*: *Viriditas* reveals that the relationship between God and creatures is reciprocal. The relationship is based in God desiring the relationship, in God’s unending love for creation, including the human soul, in the connection between God and the human soul through the spiritual continuum of the virtues, and in the life-sustaining presence of the Holy Spirit through *viriditas*. God’s essential relationship with humanity is revealed in Jesus Christ as compassionate servanthood. The human is invited into the power-sharing of compassionate servanthood.

3.) *Alienation from materiality*. All creation, including materiality, is identified as essentially blessed. The activity of the Holy Trinity in creation, *viriditas*, makes the cosmos the “book of creation” through which we can “read” God. Sin, evil, and tragedy

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<sup>191</sup> BDW I. 2.

<sup>192</sup> Kienzle, *Hildegard of Bingen and her Gospel Homilies*, 133, 270. Adam/Jesus/ humanity vocation as servanthood is particularly clear in her Sermon 1, on the parable of the unjust steward (Luke 16:1-9).

are acknowledged as realities, *and* they have no power to eternally undo God's foundational relationship of blessing and love. Healing comes through the holistic cosmos: materiality and spirituality. A grounded spiritual practice emerges through embracing both spirituality and materiality as two sides of one coin.

4.) *Alienation from empathy either for oneself or for others.* *Viriditas* is life-affirming. Suffering is revealed as the location of *ariditas*. The practice of a spirituality that invites *viriditas*, cooperates with *viriditas*, and expresses *viriditas* is a practice of filling one's life and soul with the good, the true, and the beautiful. That entails honest confession, compassion towards all who suffer, and an asceticism of justice.

5.) *Alienation from others: hyper-individualism.* *Viriditas* exposes the web of interdependency in the cosmos. It is an interdependency contingent upon God's love for all. The "kiss of peace" comes from the love of God uniquely and lovingly, embracing every image God has made out of the earth's clay.<sup>193</sup> Unique, interdependent. Both/and.

The common thread in what makes *viriditas* a symbol for healthy spirituality is relationship. Right relationship is the test. Is the relationship based in mutuality or in power-over, in mutual respect or in fear and shame, in justice or in oppression, in compassionate servanthood or in invisibility, in participation or in isolation?

*Viriditas/ariditas* make relationships visible. Cultivating the virtues, cultivating right relationship, becomes a metaphor that can infuse the soul with a wholesome fiery life, a metaphor that can imbue moist suppleness from the fountain of grace.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Fox, *Original Blessing*, 184. Cf. Schipperges and Cumming, *The World of Hildegard of Bingen*, 103.

<sup>194</sup> "Fiery life": *BDW* I. 2; "fountain" *BDW* VIII. 2.

## ***Chapter 4*** ***The Retreat***

*And after the Fire, a Thundering Silence*<sup>195</sup>

Whenever I talk about my proposed retreat, people immediately express interest in coming. They respond to the idea of Hildegard as a holistic teacher; they have run across her music or art or ecological teaching and find her intriguing. Often, they have heard the word *viriditas*. They respond to the need to address healthy and unhealthy spiritualities. They are usually completely mystified when I talk about symbols and their power for real healing and change; they are equally mystified when I talk about non-visual art forms as symbols. But something in Hildegard has struck a resonance, piqued their curiosity enough to be open to learning more. They see the value in a weekend retreat as a chance to renew their own spirits, to engage with the wisdom and art of Hildegard of Bingen, and to learn something more about how her symbols can foster a healthy, holistic spirituality.

The theme of healthy spirituality has both personal and communal dimensions, thus it is especially appropriate for those who have care of souls, such as spiritual directors, pastors, counselors, and managers. The conversations arising from the conferences<sup>196</sup> and group discussions foster a community where healthy spiritual growth

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<sup>195</sup> Canon Edward Nason West translated the “still small voice” that Elijah heard in 1Kings 19:12 as “a thundering silence.” I probably first heard him say this during a retreat at the Community of the Holy Spirit. I’m not sure if this translation appeared in any of his or anyone else’s published writings.

<sup>196</sup> Conference is used here in its monastic sense. (*collationes/conlationes*): literally, putting together. Originally it meant a dialogue. Cassian’s *Conferences* is a famous example. The Latin title for that book is *Conlationes (or: Collationes) patrum in scetica eremo*. Collation is the light mid-day meal of Benedictines, during which Cassian’s book was read. Prof. Burrows used the term for his addresses, as he

is possible. Hildegard's work is fascinating enough to start that conversation and complex enough to deepen it. A balance of learning and experience nourish the retreatants' own spiritual growth.

In Appendix 4, I lay out the plan for the retreat, including communication with retreatants beforehand, timetable, description of conference themes, and tools for evaluation. The retreat weaves Hildegard's writings, art, poetry, and music. That which was particular to her time and supportive to the spiritual health of her nuns provides a canvas upon which I can sketch a way of wholesome living for our time. It also provides resources (books, films, music) and insight in caring for others in their spiritual journey.

I call the retreat *Reading in Retreat: Hildegard of Bingen*. Notice that it is "reading" rather than "readings;" it is the act of reading and reflecting that is the focus of the retreat. The "readings" are the material through which the true work "reading" is done. *Lectio divino*, the practice of slow paced, deliberate reading, has found a following in our time. That meditative way of reading Hildegard, of regarding her illuminations, and of listening to her music and poetry, is the asceticism practiced in the conferences. While the subject matter within the retreat will be informative, it is, at heart, a spiritual enterprise. For the retreat to be best experienced, several things need to be considered in planning the retreat, including place, voice, silence, recreation, pacing, separation, the process of going deeper and then coming back ready to re-enter everyday life.

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wrote in the Course Intentions, "The lectures, offered in the traditional style of monastic "conferences" (i.e., a presentation generally without immediate response or discussion), explore key themes from the readings and invite participants into personal reflection and meditation." I am using the word in the sense that it is a reflective address which will lead to reflective dialogue. Mark Burrows, "Lectio Monastica: Bernard of Clairvaux and Early Cistercian Theology," [https://www2.bc.edu/~coolman/bcmedieval/winterimSYLL\\_2007.htm](https://www2.bc.edu/~coolman/bcmedieval/winterimSYLL_2007.htm) (accessed April 28, 2013).



### ***Consideration: Place***

“You are here to kneel  
Where prayer has been valid...”<sup>197</sup>

These lines from T.S. Eliot’s “Little Gidding” are especially meaningful in the context of this retreat. Little Gidding<sup>198</sup> was the place in the 17<sup>th</sup> century a Church of England community practiced a liturgical daily round of prayers based on the monastic practice that Hildegard had lived, a practice that had nourished her spiritual life and growth. Little Gidding is a place that can still be visited, where “prayer has been valid.” The word “place” tolls throughout that poem; place itself resonates as symbol. Where we “place” the retreat will also resonate as symbol, a bridge embodying the message.

Hildegard speaks from a women’s monastic setting and from nature; they profoundly inform her world-view. While it is not necessary to have the retreat in a women’s monastery or in the country, both make visible and audible her context. No matter where the retreat takes place, both of those well-springs of her wisdom can resonate in some form.

Because nature is so present for Hildegard, the retreat needs to acknowledge the omnipresence of nature as the milieu in which we live. Each retreat setting will have its own ways of embodying this. From walking in the woods, to sitting in a garden, to gazing out windows, to looking at pictures from nature, the retreatant is invited to remember and enact their connection with the materiality of the cosmos. Each retreatant can find opportunity to go from considering Hildegard’s insights to being physically

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<sup>197</sup> T. S. Eliot, “Little Gidding” from *The Four Quartets*, (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt, Inc., 1971), I: 47-48.

<sup>198</sup> Tony Hodgson, *Little Gidding Then and Now* (Cambridge, UK: Grove Books Limited, 2010), 3-4.

present in nature, a rhythm of moving the body into and out of human-built structures, into and out of the outdoors.

A monastic setting might work for some, but for others, including those who have suffered oppression from organized religion, a secular retreat house would simply remove some barriers. We are fortunate that the non-church world sees the value of times-out, and there are many quiet places, supportive of the spiritual journey.

### ***Consideration: Voice***

Hildegard lived in an enclosed women's monastery, an environment where women's voices were the community's voice. Men's voices came from the outside, yet they carried authority. In our time, subconsciously, because of historical social bias, we hear chant being done by *men* as the "authentic" sound and women's singing as "derivative." Monasticism is understood to be primarily about monks; women are secondary and derivative.<sup>199</sup> This does not match the actual history. So it is no wonder that the participants of the *Greenest Branch Conference* experienced hearing women chant Hildegard's music as a liberative. The authenticity of that voice, the authority of that voice resonates. When I tell people about the work I'm doing with Hildegard, the most common response is that they have CDs of her music which they find transporting and healing. Hearing that voice is one of the best ways to enter Hildegard's world. Hildegard's life was one of going from dependent and (perceived as) derivative to independent and authoritative. At the very least, CDs of women singing Hildegard's music need to be part of this retreat experience.

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<sup>199</sup> For instance: Herbert B., Workman, *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 3-54.

Voice is also an important component of the Reading in Retreat in the group reflective discussions. With an emphasis on quality listening and mutual respect, the discussions give opportunity for the retreatants to have their voices heard. All are invited to speak; none is required to speak. This practice aims at being respectful of differing personality types and recognizes that the retreatants are each in different places in their own engagement with the material. The concomitant would be that there would be a balance of speakers, allowing for diversity of voices.

### ***Consideration: Time***

Going into retreat requires time to detach, time to go deeper, time to settle and reflect, time to come up from the deep and reconnect with everyday life. As for the amount of time needed to set aside, anything from a quiet day to a weekend to several days could be shaped, as long as the focus was on the quality of time rather than the quantity. The scheduling needs to give enough time for the reflection to take place, with chances to play with crayons, water colors, chanting, silence, and/or movement giving opportunity for retreatants to enter into a wholesome Hildegardian experience. Again, an indoor/outdoor rhythm is an asset, if practical. Walking the labyrinth would be especially appropriate because it embodies the spiritual journey. Meditative dance, given a wise leader, could also be employed.<sup>200</sup> It should be noted: both walking the labyrinth and meditative dance can bring suppressed knowledge and emotions to the surface. It is not uncommon to have people cry, even uncontrollably. If that is so, they need to let the emotion express itself without interference, but with compassionate, unquestioning

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<sup>200</sup> Walt Anderson, *Therapy and the Arts: Tools of Consciousness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 54-58.

presence and awareness. So it is a good idea for the retreat leader to say upfront that this sometimes happens and counsel people not to interfere with another person's process. The leader must be trained and prepared to handle emotional and spiritual distress. The retreat is planned to be as safe a place and community as possible in which deep spiritual work can be done; deep spiritual work itself can feel overwhelming, it can feel unsafe.

### ***Consideration: Privilege***

Privilege was one of the first issues that came up when I presented my thesis idea to my doctoral class, originally planned as a week-long academic-spiritual retreat. My classmates all wanted to come but could not image carving out a full week, plus find opportunity to do the necessary reading. They wanted to know how it could be available for busy ministers. The ability to take time away from jobs, responsibilities, families assumes the privilege that someone else can and will take care of these main components of our everyday lives. Then there are the costs of transportation, room, and board, often beyond the means of the poor and working class.

In *The Principles and Practices of Retreat*, Simpson addresses privilege.<sup>201</sup> He asked: who can take the time to get away for a retreat; who can afford the cost of transportation, of the stay? In England of the 20's, when and where the book was written, this was no less of a problem than it is now. If retreats are good for the soul, how can we assure that the poor, those with busy and unrelenting careers, and those with family responsibilities are not deprived of opportunities for spiritual renewal?

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<sup>201</sup> Alan H Simpson, *The Principles and Practice of Retreat* (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co. Ltd., 1927), 52-62. I was struck with how, though of its place and time, the book addresses so many contemporary concerns.

Many retreat centers, especially monastic ones, have a sliding scale for cost, but I know from personal experience that it is hard for the retreatant to feel OK about not paying the whole. I know the retreat centers have their expenses that need to be met. How can I, in good conscience, *not* pay my fair share? Since I'm not convinced that not paying is OK, how can I ask for a break? Since I look like I have a successful career, I look competent and intelligent, how is it possible that I can't afford to go on retreat? What can we do to assure that cost is not an issue for each retreatant?

One way is to have the retreat be offered to a group, organized by someone who knows how to invest value in the members. I have seen such church groups come to West Park.<sup>202</sup> Knowing the communities where the parishioners come from, I know some couldn't possibly afford the excursion, but there wasn't any embarrassment or hanging back. The people organizing the retreat had made that a non-issue. That cannot be done by "charity." It can only be done in justice. Coming from a theology of abundance, identifying people as "needy" does not serve justice, identifying them as "gifted" does. The parishioners, rather than patronized, are honored as providing for the common good in other ways. My own experience at West Park is that I feel that it is all right if I'm "on scholarship" if I can play a concert for the monks and guests.

One of the great gifts contemplative members of a parish can bring to the parish is an understanding of the need for time-out. They can witness, encourage, and even insist that spiritual self-care is necessary for the well-being of anyone involved in ministering.

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<sup>202</sup> Holy Cross Monastery in West Park, NY, a monastery and retreat house. The Order of the Holy Cross is an Anglican Benedictine Religious Order for men. Our Lady of Glastonbury Monastery is a Roman Catholic Benedictine Religious Order for men. Both consider hospitality and spiritual care to be central to their mission; both have guest houses and offer retreats.

All forms of work - from mothering to rocket scientist- are a form of ministering; all of us need time out to refresh our souls, necessary for healthy ministry. The contemplative members of the parish can make spiritual self-care so normal that members of the parish are motivated to assist making retreats possible for each other.

Family responsibilities might be addressed by the sponsoring organization connecting the potential retreatant with appropriate child care or adult care. The way that these difficulties are addressed may reveal classism interlocking with sexism; women being assumed to be the caretakers, and wealth/class determining the course of action.<sup>203</sup>

Another issue in privilege is accessibility. We need to bear in mind that what the able think of as accessible, those with disabilities experience differently.

### ***Consideration: Going into Retreat***

Going into retreat requires a transition. Retreat is not daily life. There are several things that one does in retreat that are markedly different from daily life. It is this difference that signals to the mind and soul that a different kind of work is being done. The differences are like a portal, crossing the threshold into a different state of mind. The more one can enter into those differences, the more fruitful the retreat can be. The trick is to make the transitions into and out of those differences so that, while the needed soul-work is done, it is not encapsulated and made irretrievable after the retreat is over.

Transitions are times of anxiety, so care needs to be taken to lessen the distraction of anxiety. If the retreatant feels that they are going to a safe place, inwardly and

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<sup>203</sup> What I know as Classism is inherent in Hildegard's hierarchical world-view. This is not the place to examine her classism, only to note that understanding classism is an important consideration. It is no less inherent in the capitalist hierarchical world-view that is normative in the USA today.

outwardly, they will have more emotional and spiritual energy to invest in the process of retreat. Therefore, to accomplish as smooth a transition as possible, these things need to be considered.

1. time; the longer the retreat, the longer the transition in and out of retreat
2. place, “different,” with few distractions
3. loss of “normal” distracting stimulus, with allowance for recreation
4. knowledge that normal obligations are being met
5. knowledge that they are in safe place physically, emotionally, spiritually
6. comfort, physical and emotional

For me to slip into silence is to go home; I am used to houses of quiet, monasteries, places of prayer. Apartness, the contemplative mind/body are familiar friends. Because of this, I needed to hear loud and clear the testimony of others for whom this is not an easy transition. I need to take seriously the difficulties people face in their entry into the world of retreat and their re-entry back into their normal world.

### ***Consideration: Separation***

In order for any retreat to do its work, the retreatant needs to separate from their normal life responsibilities. This separation loosens the entanglements of the mind and soul, the attachments that can prevent the freedom necessary for refreshment. Going somewhere away from everyday life is a sign to the inner person that things are not “as usual.” It would be wise not to bring books other than those necessary for the retreat-related reading. The decision to bring other supplies for recreation, like knitting materials or snow shoes, would have to be within the context of what is helpful for the

individual retreatant in their own spiritual journey. It is important to be comfortable during the retreat, whatever that may mean for the retreatant. However, a certain amount of anxiety is to be expected whenever one finds oneself in a new environment.

Though physical separation from one's everyday life is optimal for any retreat, it is not the *sine qua non*. Even a private home retreat can be spiritually refreshing, time engaged with Hildegard's holistic spirituality. That said, for even in the most pared-down experience, some form of separation is necessary. The separation is needed to facilitate a quieting of the senses, a focus of the will through intention, an engagement with Hildegard's symbols.

"Difference" marks the going into retreat. A gentle entry for a short home retreat could be calming ritual, as simple as a cup of tea, gazing at one of Hildegard's illuminations, or saying a simple Office, such as one used at Iona.<sup>204</sup> A parish quiet day may start with a gathering which may include some quiet conversation, including an explanation of the flow of the day. The addresses themselves should be in set-aside, uncluttered space. A CD of Hildegard's music could be playing as folk enter. Saying a simple Office together, or singing chant would be an aesthetic entry into the spiritual realm. A weekend retreat in a retreat house, such as the Reading in Retreat, would begin in the evening with a meet and greet. After supper, there would be an orientation that includes a group discussion, flowing into a guided meditation on one of Hildegard's symbols as an invitation into the night silence, followed by Compline.

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<sup>204</sup> For example: J. Phillip Newell, *Celtic Prayers from Iona* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997). The Celtic prayers have the same holistic creation-affirming orientation as Hildegard's compositions.



### *Consideration: Silence*

Silence well used is the ground in which the contemplative spiritual garden may grow. “When silence is practiced in a safe community, healing can occur.”<sup>205</sup> For those who have a prayer practice, silence in retreat can give a real sense of relief, a chance to “catch up” with the soul-work being done inwardly through the Holy Spirit.<sup>206</sup> If someone practices awareness during their normal prayer exercise, the extra silence in retreat gives the senses a chance to enliven, clarify experientially.<sup>207</sup> Silence can allow deeply hidden things to surface, so that truth can manifest, freedom happen. It is not an accident that all mystical and ascetic traditions teach silence.

Silence itself has many forms. The monastics of the 12<sup>th</sup> century understood silence as encompassing those visual and mental quietings that encouraged attentiveness to the Divine. Few monastic communities in the Middle Ages were what we think of as “silent.” They were a beehive of activity, noisy with the activities needed for the survival of the community. Yet, because the monastics understood silence as mental quieting, they lived in silence. If silence only means not-talking, silence becomes silly as people wildly gesticulate to get someone’s attention for a perfectly reasonable cause. Silence signals the mind to work differently, as do kneeling in church, holding hands, gazing at a painting or river, or smelling incense. Silence for the purpose of retreat includes such things as: refraining from curious looking around, refraining from drawing attention, refraining from reading for information or distraction. In positive terms, this means

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<sup>205</sup> Jane E. Vennard, *Be Still: Designing and Leading Contemplative Retreats* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, Inc., 2000), 16.

<sup>206</sup> Personal experience. No one has communicated a similar experience to me, and I can’t remember reading about this specifically, but I’m pretty sure I’m not the only one.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

keeping things calm and simple. The retreatant's job is to do what they need to do to enter into receptivity of the soul. For one that may mean reading a spiritual book; for another, that is a breach of silence.

Each person experiences silence within their own context, their own temperament and experiences. Being an introvert or an extrovert can make silence more or less easy to learn, a pleasant experience or a nightmare. But temperament is not the final arbiter of the value of silence for that particular soul at that particular moment in their journey.

Silence bears both the weight of oppression *and* the crown of privilege. Historically, some form of silence was one of the first requirements of “dedicated” women,<sup>208</sup> concurrent with an early form of enclosure, which is itself a form of silence. Since their enclosure insured that they were not in public spaces, how could they speak in public? Yet, in the ancient and medieval world, this “enclosure” was only possible for those who could financially afford *not* to go to the market place. They needed someone else to go there on their behalf. It was the silence of the privileged well-off, in a society where the workers were loud and unheard, omnipresent and invisible.<sup>209</sup>

Our society still has residual repression of women's voices, as is experienced in denominations that do not allow women to preach or allow women to have ecclesiastical authority. The religion that nourishes the women into spiritual maturity denies them a voice in that religion. The silencing of their voices and the privileging of male voices is keenly experienced as oppressive by the women who feel called to speak. Being required

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<sup>208</sup> Flowing from silencing women in church: 1Cor. 14:34; 1Tim. 2:11-12. Cf. McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 41-42.

<sup>209</sup> Audre Lorde raises consciousness of the issue of visibility/invisibility through the experience of the black woman in public. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1996), 42.

to be silent by someone with religious authority, even for a short time, is experienced as being silenced, rather than being invited into contemplative silence.

There is also the communal experience of silence, which is not the same as the personal. In the best of all possible worlds, both silences would support and deepen the other. As a member of a religious community, I experienced both of these blessed silences. In the normal daily round we experienced silent meals, the Great Silence, silence in halls, waiting in silence for a communal activity to begin.

However, I also witnessed the misuse of silence, silence used as a weapon and punishment, or a silence that allowed misunderstandings to continue unresolved and amplify for decades. This misuse of silence can be observed in any family or community- the community against the one, and the one against others in the community or against the community as a whole. The silence itself reveals and amplifies the unsoundness. The echoes of unsound silence can dissolve the bonds of community. When fear commands silence, the fear within the soul becomes the anger it fears, and the anger destroys.<sup>210</sup> This unholy silence is the experience of many a wounded soul who comes into retreat.

I interviewed The Rev. BK Hipsher, one of my colleagues in the doctoral program, because she expressed interest in helping me think through barriers and oppressions in reference to giving or taking a retreat. I asked her about a negative experience she had had in going on retreat.<sup>211</sup> As a woman, she had already experienced being silenced by societal oppression. She had grown up as a preacher's daughter in a

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<sup>210</sup> Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 42.

<sup>211</sup> The Rev. Dr. BK Hipsher, interview by author, Episcopal Divinity School, Jan. 11, 2010.

denomination where women were not allowed to preach, yet even as an adolescent BK felt called to the ministry, called to preaching. She was profoundly silenced in the name of the religion she loved. As a young woman, BK was part of a progressive Roman Catholic parish. A group from that parish went on retreat at an Episcopal retreat center.

I knew it was to be a "silent" retreat but just did not understand what that really meant. I had never had any experience of contemplative silence and no good introduction to it before the retreat, so when the prospect of keeping silent for an entire day was confronted I was unprepared for the emotions that arose. I did feel oppressed and resented the mandatory silence. I didn't leave the retreat but another woman and I left the center for the afternoon and had a lovely afternoon of driving through the area, stopping to walk in the woods and enjoy the scenery, and get to know one another and chat away from the rest.<sup>212</sup>

The retreat organizers assumed that because they had mentioned the silence up front that the participants knew what to expect. The organizers had experienced silence and knew its benefits; they came from a tradition where silence has long been honored. Silence was assumed to be considered a good thing. They did not imagine how oppressive others, who come from very different experiences, might find this. The unexpected emotions came at least partly from BK's previous experiences of mandatory silence, the intersection of religion and silencing. She experienced the demand for her to be silent as oppression. I needed to hear BK's story because I never did *not* know why silence is important. And yet, I experienced silence in community as oppression. I knew silence intimately as both a privilege and as an oppression. That being said, silence *in retreat* was always a treat for me. BK's experience is therefore, for me, a cautionary tale. Both/and.

Before committing to coming to a retreat, retreatants need to know about silence and the reasons behind it. Silence needs to be an invitation rather than a rule; silence

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<sup>212</sup> The Rev. Dr. BK Hipsher, email to author, Dec. 10, 2012.

needs to be seen as a chance to listen to God and our inward wisdom and a chance to let others hear God and their own inward wisdom. Silence needs to be understood as the opportunity to go deeper, not just a refraining from talking. Retreatants need to know ahead of time that if they wish to speak there will be times and places where they can do this without disturbing others. They also need to know about the need to withdraw from unnecessary communication with their “normal life.”

Orientation needs to include going over the reasons for silence. Each retreat house has its rules concerning places and times of silence, places and times for conversation. The expectation and practice of silence needs to be flexible enough for each retreatant to benefit as they are able. Clear times and places where conversation can take place need to be agreed upon and safety valves established. The silence of retreat is not absolute; there is room in it for acknowledging the presence of others. Conversely, those who wish for silence need to have the commitment of the others to honor that as well.

If the retreat house is also a monastery, we are guests at the periphery of the ongoing relational life of a community. As guests we need to respect that this is their home and that times and places of silence are hallmarks of monastic life. This particular retreat allows for conversation as part of the retreat process. There will be group discussions. Silence is not the *sine qua non* of the retreat, but it is one of its most powerful adjunct professors.

### ***Consideration: Reflective Process***

Times directly after conferences will be “bracketed”, a chance for each retreatant to spend time with the symbols, time to listen to their own inner wisdom, the “soft

raindrops”<sup>213</sup> of the Holy Spirit. Because the thrust of the retreat is to engage symbolic thought, the arts and movement would be especially appropriate activities. Journaling is beneficial for many, but not all. For those, the wordiness of keeping a journal is a violation of the silence needed to go deep into contemplation.

### ***Consideration: Grounding***

Grounding is a practice for spiritual safety. As I described in Chapter 2, there are dimensions of grounding that open the spiritual journey’s trajectory. Now I would like to emphasize that this is the most necessary practice to ensure the spiritual, emotional, and psychological safety of the retreatants. There is a good chance one or more of them will have suffered trauma, including adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. These, especially, are susceptible to dissociation, a detachment from reality.<sup>214</sup> Being ungrounded or anxiety can lead them into a dissociative episode, which can be unsettling for them, as well as for those who witness it. One way to avoid dissociative episodes is to intentionally ground at the beginning of any meditation. I do this through a guided visualization, imagining the soles of our feet grounding us as roots of a tree.

A patient at the hospital, who had been repeatedly sexually abused as a child, wanted to meditate, but had had dissociative episodes while practicing transcendental meditation. We had talked about God’s presence within the materiality of the created order (*viriditas*), and then I led her in the grounding meditation, actually using Hildegard’s symbol cluster surrounding *viriditas*, including the images of moisture and

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<sup>213</sup> *The Life of the Saintly Hildegard by Gottfried of Disibodenberg and Theodoric of Echternach*, trans. with notes Hugh Feiss (Toronto: Peregrina, 1996), 66–67.

<sup>214</sup> Cara L. Stiles, “The Influence,” 9, 14.

nourishment rising from the earth through the roots. When she was grounded we stayed in meditation for several minutes. I watched carefully to make sure she was safe. If I had noticed anything I would have brought her back with a sensory grounding.<sup>215</sup> She experienced the meditation as healing and affirming, and was delighted that she had a way to safely return to meditating.

I have done the same with an outpatient who had been abused as a young woman, whose therapist was very concerned that we were doing this. Once again, with grounding and discussing “emergency exit” strategies, we were able to meditate safely.

### ***Consideration: Talking about symbols***

Through the retreat, people from diverse backgrounds are introduced to aesthetic theology in the physical attributes of the retreat house, connection with nature, liturgy, Hildegard’s writings, and in the use of art, poetry, and music in the weaving of the conferences. As spiritual leaders, we need to learn about symbols, how they influence us.

This raises a few questions. How much does the retreat director talk about this process? Won’t talking about how the brain is working interfere with the direct experience? Which gets precedence, learning about symbols or the process of using symbols to further one’s own spiritual growth? Since the retreat holds both, how does one decide which direction to go at any moment?

The answer lies in the use of the symbolic material of Hildegard. By using many different types of symbols and allowing for many different types of reflection, the retreat itself highlights symbols. In introducing Hildegard and her symbols, the flow of

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<sup>215</sup> Maryann Rigoni, “Grounding Techniques Explained” in *Behavioral Health Resources Website* (2009), <http://www.bcbhr.org/Articles.aspx?7> (accessed April 30, 2013).

conversation raises why we chose that symbol, how Hildegard used it, and ask what it raises in our minds, what other symbols resonate with it *for us*. We both use the symbols and talk about their content *and also* reflect on the process of engaging with the symbols. During group reflections, the leader asks questions that lead to conversations about symbols themselves and about how they work within our minds. The leader uses the symbols as the retreat unfolds; the retreatants can become more aware of the workings of symbols, and their omnipresence. This is responsible justice-work because it is the retreatant himself or herself who is reflecting on the process of symbolic work.

Always we need to keep in mind that symbols are multivalent, they carry more than one meaning, often contradictory meanings. No symbol is inherently safe or inherently evil. So care of process needs to be taken, awareness of impact observed. One of the safeguards is the time for group reflection. This is particularly important because while the symbol clusters surrounding *viriditas* are generally holistic and supportive-feel-good, as it were- shifting paradigms is deep and unsettling work.

Since this is symbolic work at the threshold of the preconscious, it is not unusual for people to say they felt afraid at some point. For example, I gave a Lenten retreat for some women who are experienced in the spiritual life and meditation. At the start of each guided meditation<sup>216</sup> we grounded ourselves. One meditation used the symbol of going into a lake, deeper and deeper, and being given a treasure to bring up to the surface. Another was climbing a mountain, and bringing a gift back home. After the first meditation, several of the women expressed that they had felt fear when they imagined

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<sup>216</sup> A guided meditation is one where a leader vocally guides others into a different state of consciousness. This includes creative visualization and being directed into a breath-based meditation.



going deeper into the water. One woman imagined bubbles showing her which way was up and supporting her, interpreted this as bubbles of God's love welling up from the deep. Another felt the warm hands of God's love protecting her. After the second meditation, one woman said that she had felt lost and confused on the path. Another said that she was seeing her whole life story on that path, and much was tragic. Both said that as the meditation continued they were able to gain perspective, find symbols that were healing, strengthening, and ultimately joyful. Each woman found a symbolic way to be safe. They all said that my warm voice and assurances along the way gave them a sense of safety. This is why grounding at the beginning of meditation is necessary.

While none of the conferences in the Reading in Retreat is a guided meditation, they lead the retreatants into their own symbolic work, work at the preconscious level, so it would be normal to feel fear at some point. Any symbol can be a trigger. Asking "what did it feel like?" opens the conversation to take place at the border between discursive and symbolic language.

### ***Consideration: Re-creation***

Because the soul is doing hard work during retreat, and the body and mind are busy dealing with an unaccustomed strangeness of milieu, taking breaks is essential. Physical movement, exercise, naps, artwork or crafts can all bring wholesomeness to the enterprise. One of the reasons why I am drawn to Hildegard is her embodied, holistic teaching. By honoring the need for recreation, this part of her wisdom is illuminated, exemplified, experienced. The time-table should allow plenty of opportunity and encouragement for recreation.

### *Consideration: Re-entry*

At the close of the time of separation, the retreatant needs to be given opportunity to gently reconnect with their daily life. The amount of time spent in retreat and the depth of separation need to be taken into account. A sudden re-entry can be disorienting. “People returning from a contemplative retreat are open and vulnerable.”<sup>217</sup> A well planned and executed re-entry will enable the retreatant to bring the fruits of the time away back into their regular experiences. Integration, always a worthy goal, is more likely to happen if during the final stages of the retreat there is time to both reflect on the retreat experience *and* reflect on the intersection of spirituality and their daily life.

It is worth remembering that recent studies have shown that stepping through a door causes people to forget what they were just thinking.<sup>218</sup> The passing through a doorway is both literally and symbolically liminal. Our bodies, our minds, our souls all work together. So we need to plan on how to minimize the embodied disconnect between the retreat experience and going back into normal life, how to reconnect with the retreat experience once we have passed through the portals back to our normal lives. I used to give Elderhostel lectures at Holy Cross Monastery. One of the guests, a Jewish woman, had never experienced communal silence before. That experience was so meaningful for her that, when we left, she asked that we keep silence in the car for the first hour so that she could take a bit of the silence with her.

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<sup>217</sup> Vennard, *Be Still*, 30.

<sup>218</sup> Charles B. Bremmer and Jeffery M. Zacks, “Why Walking Through a Door Makes You Forget,” *Scientific American.com* (Dec. 13, 2011), <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=why-walking-through-doorway-makes-you-forget> (accessed March 21, 2013).

### *Healthy Spirituality and the Weekend Retreat*

Since none of the conferences actually brings up an unhealthy spirituality as described in Chapter 1, what difference will this make? Based on our current knowledge of the brain and symbolic thinking, I believe that the healthy spirituality inherent in the symbol cluster surrounding *viriditas* will give the soul the food it needs to find ways to healing.<sup>219</sup> In Chapter 2, discursive confrontation was shown as useless in subverting a paradigm; it is by symbolic work that paradigms are changed. All the unhealthy spiritualities discussed are manifested in existential alienation. In Chapter 3, I showed how the paradigm of *viriditas* could overwrite the paradigm of each unhealthy spirituality. In Chapter 4, each of the conferences addresses something in *viriditas* that intersects with the alienations, but avoids unhelpful direct discursive confrontation. All the healthy spiritualities discussed are manifested in “right relationship”. Each conference centers on one aspect of that existential relationship, flowing from the God who is Love. When the symbols for that central relationship, Love, claim the soul and organize that person’s world-view, then the unhealthy spiritualities find less and less claim on that person. As the retreatant does their own soul-work, the alienations at the heart of unhealthy spiritualities are shown for the illusions that they are. Alienations from self, by authority, from nature, from empathy, and/or from mutuality are revealed as transgressions of the primal relationship of *viriditas*. The paradigm has shifted; the beloved of God knows herself to be filled with *viriditas*.

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<sup>219</sup> Cf. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30<sup>th</sup> anniv. ed., trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, (New York: Continuum, 2006). I believe that the teaching method embodied in the retreat’s symbolic work corresponds to Paulo Freire’s and answers the thematic concern in Belenky, *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, that passive listening as a way of learning creates “silent” women.

## ***Chapter 5***

### ***Reflections on the Process***

When I began this thesis, my office looked out at my garden at Gryphonhaven, our home in Stowe, Vermont, at the eastern foot of Mt. Mansfield. As I write this concluding chapter, my office looks out at Mt. Mansfield itself, from the western side. Today dark clouds envelop the mountain, snow gently falls. Other days I have seen it glistening with snow, pink in the sunset, or verdantly green. The physical move from one side of the mountain is an outward and visible sign of the inward journey within my soul. Change has taken place. Closing one path; opening another. The change is connected to work already done; who I am is connected to who I am becoming. The dying to one dream; finding the dream transformed. Letting go; embracing. Both/and. The spiral compasses the inner-outer relationship.

Looking back, I find myself startled at just how much the paradigms have shifted within me. An ecofeminist paradigm is already profoundly instructing my unconscious world-view. I *know* that relational ethics are mature ethics. I *know* that relational social ethics is the only responsible way forward for our planet. I *know* that including plants and animals as members incorporate in our planetary body is rational. I *know* that I have witnessed the power of healing through holistic symbols. This time of engaging with Hildegard and her symbols provided the context in which that shift could take place, and gave me the opportunity to practice holy relationality, make it visible. While I know that the hierarchical patriarchy paradigm still is part of my unconscious world-view, because it remains our cultural norm, I *know* it does not reveal or reflect *viriditas*.

I began this study with two unhealthy spiritualities in view: centerlessness and suffering. They were serious enough to warrant further study and reflection. As my study progressed, I realized that other unhealthy spiritualities needed to be addressed. In the process of preparing this thesis, I came to know them as such and to find the common thread: alienation.

While alienation has a place in psychology and sociology, it is in the meaning-giving realm of spiritual care that *anam cara*<sup>220</sup> and pastors can apply effective balm. The spiritual damage of alienation is discerned and named; the spiritual resources for healing the wound is discerned and named. It was by identifying the alienations that I identified the healing symbol *viriditas*, a symbol that could open the door to the inner chamber so that wholesome soul-work can be done.

### *Assessment of Efficacy*

What would healthy spirituality look like, after the retreat on *viriditas*? How could we tell if the symbol was actually healing, overturning the unhealthy paradigms and symbols? What signs would witness to deep change, deep healing? For the pastoral care givers who attended, what would indicate that they had learned the value of using symbols as a liberative pedagogy? Did they actually learn a practical way to support healthy spirituality for themselves and others?

The retreat is but a moment in the person's life; it happens in bracketed time in a place apart. The world to which the retreatant returns is still invested in hierarchical patriarchy. And the holistic paradigms Hildegard presents are subversive to the

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<sup>220</sup> *Anam Cara*: Gaelic meaning "soul friend".

normative paradigm; they are memorable. Both/and. I remember the *Greenest Branch's* worship service and know that the engagement with those symbols is still resonating in the lives of many who were there. I know because we still talk about it.

The symbolic work of the soul is subterranean, taking place largely in the subconscious; the process of paradigm shifts remains hidden. What can be observed is the language of the retreatant, their choice of metaphors in talking about God and creation. Are they claiming relationship and mutuality? Or are they using metaphors of alienation? Are the pastoral care-givers more aware of symbols that already surround them, and more open to use symbol-work consciously in the care that they give?

One way I could test the efficacy of the retreat model would be to take time with the retreatants to answer a reflective evaluation sheet at the close of the retreat.<sup>221</sup> The questions would include identifying moments of anxiety and how those were dealt with. Follow-up communication through an email list and newsletter would provide continued opportunities for me to hear from the retreatants. Another useful follow-up would be “refresher” workshops or retreat.<sup>222</sup>

One example of what this might look like in pastor care is a story of a woman whom I was counseling. She asked me about the presence of the demonic in the world.<sup>223</sup> She is an organic farmer, bi-racial, a survivor of repeated childhood sexual abuse, who loves to make things and do creative work. She had wanted and expected to be a mother, but had suffered a miscarriage. For medical reasons she was advised to have surgery that

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<sup>221</sup> See Appendix 4: Retreat: D: Evaluation and Follow-up.

<sup>222</sup> Dr. Margaret Benefiel uses all three effectively for feedback and evaluation and also for ongoing support for those who have been participated in her workshops. She is the Executive Officer of Executive Souls, LLC, [www.executivesoul.com](http://www.executivesoul.com).

<sup>223</sup> The story is told with her permission.

would preclude her ever having a child from her own body. Layers of loss, grief, feelings that she felt she “should” feel guilty all had been discussed and explored. This was our fourth session and she was at peace with the surgery. She brought up demonic presence because it is often spoken of in her own church. Her concern intersected with beliefs of some members of her church about the state of her soul when she was in surgery, very fear-based. I talked with her at length about *viriditas*, attaching it to her own experience as a farmer and creative person, reflecting back to her what I had heard her say in our conversations together. She lit up; greenness is what she lives for. *Viriditas* has become a symbol of hope for her, an assurance of God’s presence in all she is and all she does, and God’s unwavering desire for her wellbeing in a both/and world. Other people’s concern about demonic powers is not her concern because *viriditas* is her paradigm.

I bring that as an example of what we might see when symbolic work is doing its job. She already had a mature faith and great wisdom, having already worked through so much, but was feeling fragile and threatened by the talk of demons and hell. The symbol *viriditas* worked as an inoculation against the dis-ease of fear and alienation. She has resilience. This is what healthy spirituality looks like.

### ***Falling Short of the Mark***

Hildegard’s compositions never fail to inspire me. I am also conscious that I am continuously redacting what she actually says. She *is* from another milieu, radically so. And much of what she takes for granted, corporal acts of penance in spiritual practice<sup>224</sup> and aristocratic privilege in social structure, for instance, are not practices that I would

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<sup>224</sup> Sabina Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen: a Visionary Light*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 1989), 74.

condone. While I believe I have been faithful to the core of her holistic teaching, I have not, in this thesis, dealt with that which I find problematic.

I did not spend much time with the *viriditas/ariditas* continuum. For those giving care to the depressed or those going through transitions, a more thorough exploration of the symbols is needed. Another concern is that Hildegard and I are not only within the Christian tradition, it is the air we breathe, so while I can see how *viriditas* is within the pan-cultural four elements understanding of the cosmos, this may not translate immediately for those of other religions and cultures. Also, different cultures (or personal experience) may have stronger negative resonances with some of the symbols. As I have said, multivalency is both an aid to spiritual growth, and a potential source of psychological and spiritual distress. Add to that- there is no doubt that many of Hildegard's illuminations are weird and disturbing. Some may find engagement with them too great a leap, or a distraction.

### ***Future Work***

My first goal is to give this retreat, often and widely. I have already used some of the symbols and insights in sermons, retreats, and counseling, with good response. I will shape this material into proposals to groups and retreat centers. I will also shape it into a book so that others who wish to give a *Viriditas: Reading in Retreat* will have the resources necessary to do so. I would like to connect with the Green Mountain Monastery nuns because they are a locus of Thomas Berry's ecotheology, using that connection to offer retreats on *viriditas* and supporting their work. Because I believe that Hildegard's methods, symbols, and message are of particular helpfulness for pastors and



those with spiritual care, I will create conferences for other retreats. I will continue to bend my scholarship towards pastoral care and encouraging others engaged in pastoral care.

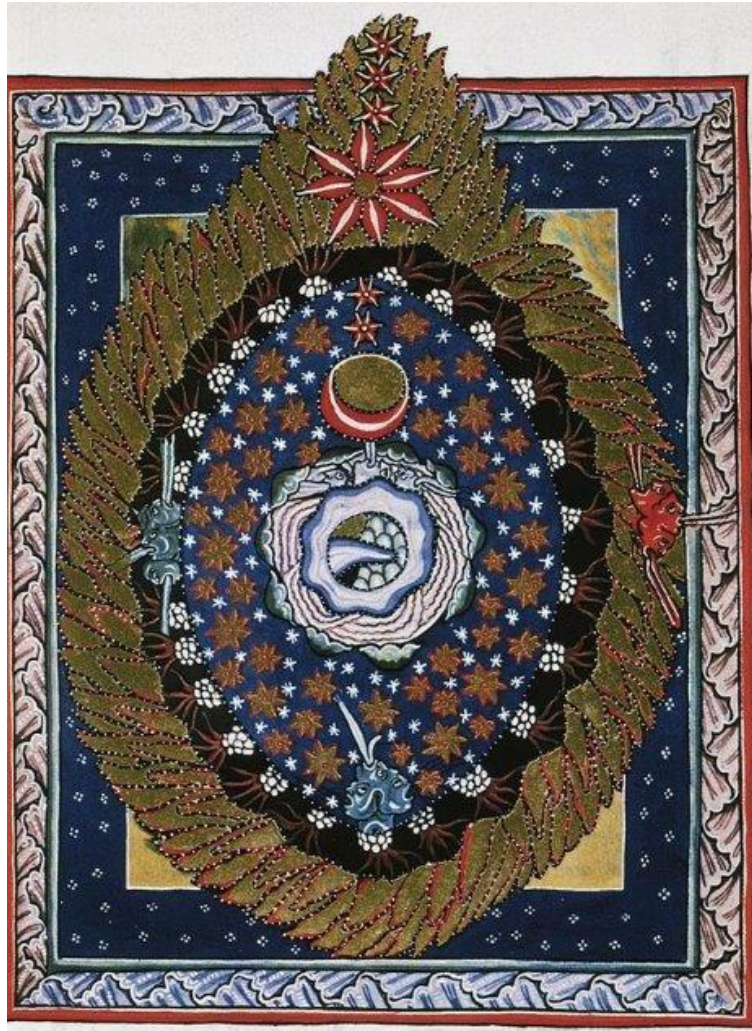
I am also acutely aware that this thesis barely scratches the surface of both Hildegard's ascetical theology and the symbol *viriditas*. She has much, much more to say on the vices and sin. And this study did not include the intersection of *viriditas* with Mary, mother of Jesus, or with Jesus. Neither was this study a complete compendium of current unhealthy spiritualities. My hope is that having opened the door, further work can be done. I hope that others who read this work will be inspired to give sermons, retreats, and spiritual counsel based on Hildegard's symbols.

More than anything, I am grateful for the opportunity given in creating this thesis for me to engage with Hildegard as spiritual healer. Because she has embraced the both/and of creation, not shying away from its complexity but embracing that complexity, she has provided a wholesome ascesis. Her imaginative use of symbols has provided me with tools for holistic pastoral care. Like Caritas embracing the cosmos, Hildegard embraces the human experience with life-giving *viriditas*: grace and wisdom.

## *Appendix I*

### *Illuminations*

A: Cosmic Egg<sup>225</sup>



“After this I saw a vast instrument, round and shadowed, in the shape of an egg... there was bright fire with, as it were, a shadowy zone under it. And in that fire there was a globe of sparkling flame so great that the whole instrument was illuminated by it...”  
(*Scivias* I.3)

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<sup>225</sup> *Scivias* I. 3, ca 1175, ARTstor (online), New York: New York, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed May 3, 2013). Cf. Fox, *Illuminations*, 34.

B. Caritas (Trinity)<sup>226</sup>



“I, the highest and fiery power, have kindled every spark of life, and I emit nothing that is deadly. I decide on all reality. With my lofty wings I fly above the globe: With wisdom I have rightly put the universe in order. I, the fiery life of divine essence, am aflame beyond the beauty of the meadows, I gleam in the waters, and I burn in the sun, moon, and stars. With every breeze, as with invisible life that contains everything. I awaken everything to life. The air lives by turning green and being in bloom. The waters flow as if they were alive. The sun lives in its light, and the moon is enkindled, after its disappearance, once attained by the light of the sun so that the moon is again revived. The stars, too give a clear light with their beaming...

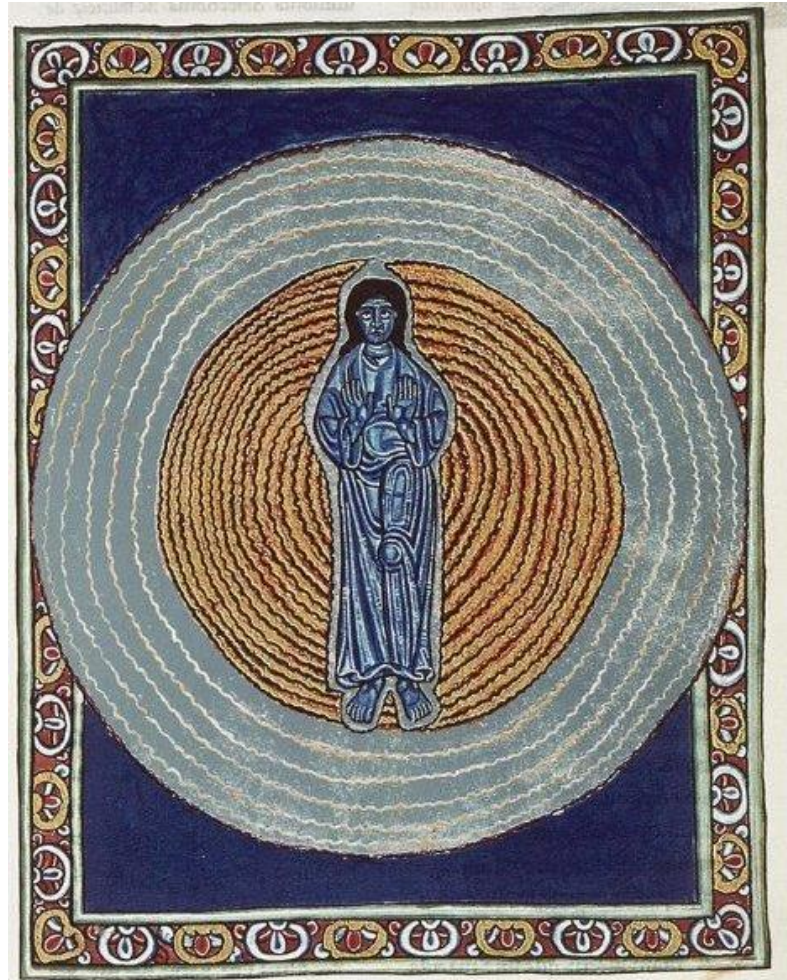
For what you see as a marvelously beautiful figure in God’s mystery and in the midst of southern breezes- a figure similar to a human being- signifies the Love of our heavenly Father. It is Love- in the power of the everlasting Godhead, full of exquisite beauty, marvelous in its mysterious gifts. Love appears in a human form because God’s Son, when he put on flesh, redeemed our lost humanity in the service of Love. On this account the countenance is of such beauty and splendor that you can more easily gaze at the sun than at it. For the abundance of Love gleams and shines in the sublime lightning flash of its gifts in such a way that it surpasses every insight of human understanding by which we can otherwise know in our soul the most varied things. As a result, none of us can grasp this abundance with our minds. But this fact will be shown here in an allegory so that we can know in faith what we cannot see with our outward eyes.” (BDW I. 2)

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<sup>226</sup> BDW I, cited in Schipperges, *The World of Hildegard of Bingen*, 66, <http://endeavor.flo.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=960815> (accessed May 3, 2013).



C: The Trinity: Sapphire Human Form<sup>227</sup>

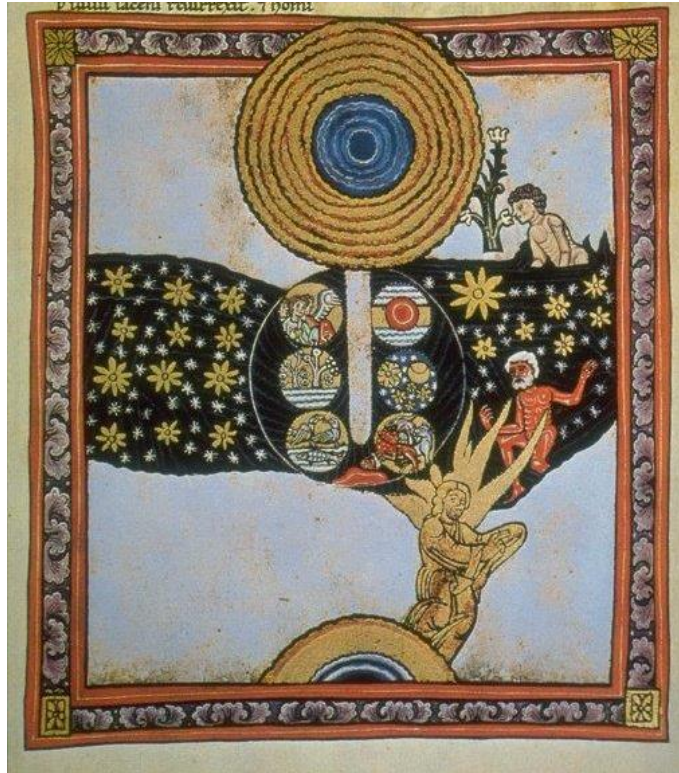


“Then I saw a bright light, and in this light the figure of a man the color of a sapphire, which was all blazing with a gentle glowing fire. And that bright light bathed the whole of the glowing fire, and the glowing fire bathed the bright light; and the bright light and the glowing fire poured over the whole human figure, so that the three were on light in one power of potential.” (*Scivias* II. 2)

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<sup>227</sup> *Scivias* II. 2, ca 1175, ARTstor (online), New York: New York, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed May 3. 2013). Cf. Fox, *Illuminations*, 22.

D: The Eternal Word and Adam (Six Days of Creation)<sup>228</sup>



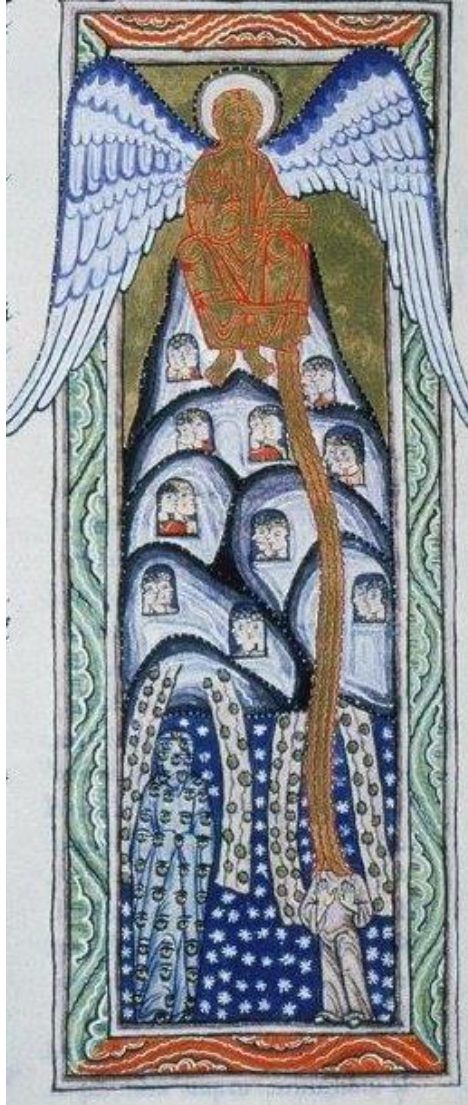
“And I, a person not glowing with the strength of strong lions or taught by their inspiration, but a tender and fragile rib imbued with a mystical breath, saw a blazing fire, incomprehensible, inextinguishable, wholly living and wholly Life, with a flame in it the color of the sky, which burned ardently with a gentle breath, and which was as inseparably within the blazing fire as the viscera are within a human being. And I saw that the flame sparked and blazed up. And behold! The atmosphere suddenly rose up in a dark sphere of great magnitude, and that flame hovered over it and gave it one blow after another, which struck sparks from it, until that atmosphere was perfected and so Heaven and earth stood fully formed and resplendent. Then the same flame was in that fire, and that burning extended itself to a little clod of mud which lay at the bottom of the atmosphere, and warmed it so that it was made flesh and blood, and blew upon it until it rose up a living human.” (*Scivias* II.1)

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<sup>228</sup> *Scivias* II. 1, ca 1175, ARTstor (online), New York: New York, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed May 3, 2013). Fox, *Illuminations*, 66.



E: The One Enthroned<sup>229</sup>



Detail: the Fear of God

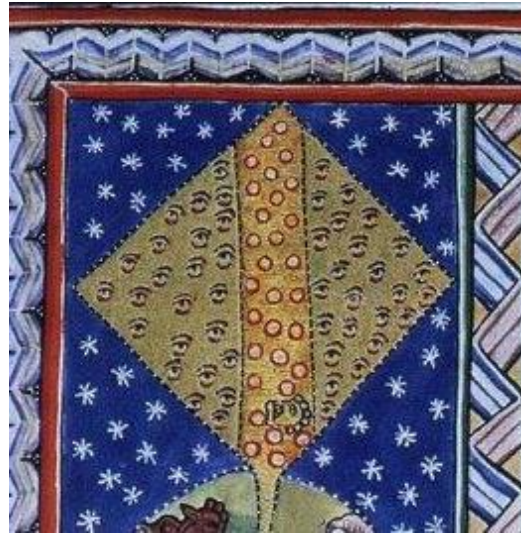


*And before him at the foot of the mountain stands an image full of eyes on all sides. For the Fear of the Lord stands in God's presence with humility and gazes on the Kingdom of God, surrounded by the clarity of a good and just intention, exercising her zeal and stability among humans. And thus you can discern no human form in her on account of the eyes. For by the acute sight of her contemplation she counters all forgetfulness of God's justice, which people often feel in their mental tedium, so no inquiry by weak mortals eludes her vigilance."* (Scivias I. 1. 2)

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<sup>229</sup> *Scivias* I. 1, ca 1175, ARTstor (online), New York: New York, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed May 3, 2013). Fox, *Illuminations*, 78.

F: Detail: Soul and Body<sup>230</sup>



“Then I saw a most great and serene splendor, flaming, as it were, with many eyes, with four corners pointing toward the four parts of the world, which was manifest to me in the greatest mystery to show me the secret of the Supernal Creator... And I saw the image of a woman who had a perfect human form in her womb. And behold! By the secret design of the Supernal Creator that form moved with vital motion, so that a fiery globe that had no human lineaments possessed the heart of the form and touched its brain and spread itself through all its members” (*Scivias* I. 4)

<sup>230</sup> *Scivias* I. 4, ca 1175, ARTstor (online), New York: New York, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed May 3, 2013). Fox, *Illuminations*, 54.



G: Cosmic Wheel<sup>231</sup>



“I saw how moisture from the gentle layer of air flowed over the earth. This air revived the earth’s greening power and caused all fruits to put forth seeds and become fertile... From the gentle layer of air, moisture effervesces over the earth. This awakens the earth’s greenness and causes all fruits to appear through germination.” (*BDW IV*)

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<sup>231</sup> *BDW IV*, cited in cited in Schipperges, *The World of Hildegard of Bingen*, 91, <http://endeavor.flo.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=960815> (accessed May 3, 2013).



## H: Caritas Embracing Cosmos

Caritas<sup>232</sup>



Caritas Embracing the Cosmos<sup>233</sup>



Hildegard often refers to God's love as embracing, *amplexatus*. The first illumination is of the Trinity in Divine Love, the Second shows that divine love encircling, embracing humanity. Through microcosmos/macrocosmos, Hildegard understands this to mean God's love embracing all of creation. In the Sermon 26, highlighted in this thesis, *amplexatus* is used to describe God's embracing of the penitent.

"And he, certainly: Faith, said to him, responding to his inner reflection: *Your brother*, in accordance with the recognition by which he knows God, *has come*, because he made an upright journey, and *your father has killed the fatted calf*, that is: he by whom you were created; has repeated the passion of his Son who brought the abundance of life, *because he received him safe*, in good report, and embraced him." (Sermon 26)

I: Theophany of the Fountain: *Caritas, Humilitas* and *Pax*<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> BDW I, cited in Schipperges, *The World of Hildegard of Bingen*, 66, <http://endeavor.flo.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=960815> (accessed May 3, 2013).

<sup>233</sup> BDW II, cited in Schipperges, *The World of Hildegard of Bingen*, 75, <http://endeavor.flo.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=960815> (accessed May 3, 2013).



“...And thus humanity is the deed of God’s right hand. God’s hand clothed us and called us to the heavenly wedding feast. This is what humility did because the highest God looked down upon the center of the Earth and established the divine Church through ordinary people. Those who have fallen should rise up in repentance and renew themselves by a holy way of life through multiplication of virtues like fresh-blooming flowers. Yet arrogance is always evil because it oppresses everything, disperses everything, and deprives everything. By way of contrast, humility does not rob people or take anything from them. Rather, it holds together everything in love. God has (descended together with her) to the Earth in love and brought together all the powers of the virtues. For the virtues strive towards the Son of God, just as a virgin rejects men and declares Christ her bridegroom. Such virtues are associated with humility when Christ goes with them to the wedding feast of the King.” (BDW VIII. 4)<sup>235</sup>

## Appendix 2: Connections

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<sup>234</sup> BDW, VIII, cited in Schipperges, *The World of Hildegard of Bingen*, 138, <http://endeavor.flo.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=960815> (accessed May 3, 2013).

<sup>235</sup> BDW, VIII. 4, trans. Cunningham except for the parenthesis, which is mine.

## Connection A: Labyrinth



Siward Labyrinth,<sup>236</sup>  
from an 11<sup>th</sup> c. manuscript,  
Abingdon, England.



Chartres Cathedral labyrinth, circa 1220<sup>237</sup>

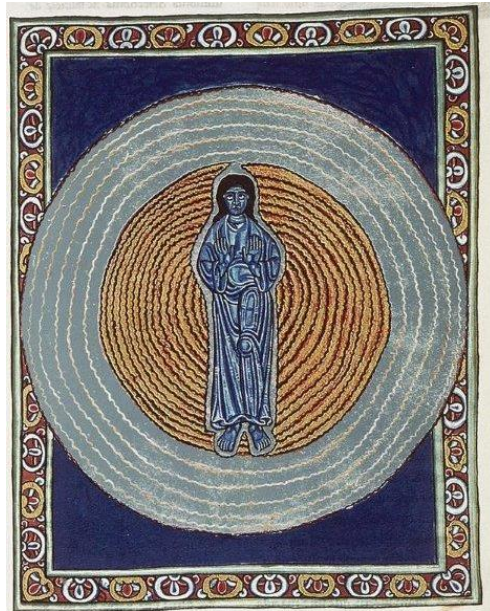
The use of labyrinths in Christian contexts is attested as early as 4<sup>th</sup> c. Though originally they were laid out to be walked, people have found that tracing the design with the finger in a contemplative way also supports symbolic soul-work. Though there are no known labyrinths in Hildegard's immediate vicinity from her time, there were two of uncertain dating in Cologne, since lost. There are several relatively nearby in Belgium and France. The idea of symbolic pilgrimage was a common one in Hildegard's era. The connection I find with Hildegard is multifaceted: walking the labyrinth is an embodied act of meditation; it engages preconscious symbolic thought; it symbolically enacts the pilgrim life-journey; it is full of motion and turning (converting); only those who have actually experienced the labyrinth have credibility in talking about that experience (experiential vs. speculative knowledge).

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<sup>236</sup> Cambridge University Library, Kk.3.21. From a Boethius Manuscript. Permission pending.

<sup>237</sup> <http://www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk/album/Images%20for%20Powerpoint/slides/chartres-labyrinth.jpg>. Used with permission.





“Through this fountain of life came the embrace of God’s maternal love, which nourished us unto life and is our help in perils, and is the deepest and sweetest charity and prepares us for penitence.” (*Scivias* II. 2)

Hildegard here uses blue to symbolize compassion. Blue is the color of water in a stream or lake. The particular blue in her illumination is the color of sapphires which hold spiritual virtue, strengthening the intellect and bringing special blessings from God.<sup>239</sup> Her antiphon *O Ecclesia* begins “O Ecclesia, your eyes are like sapphires...”<sup>240</sup> To produce that blue in any artifact at her time would have been costly indeed. In Chartres, France, at about the same time, another masterpiece was produced, the startling Blue Madonna, Throne of Wisdom, c.1150. Costly, life-giving, source of wisdom and blessing- the blue of the motherly human-form is but one layer of symbols in this particular illumination.

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<sup>238</sup> *Scivias* II. 2, ca 1175, ARTstor (online), New York: New York, <http://www.artstor.org> (accessed May 3. 2013).

<sup>239</sup> Hildegard of Bingen, *Physica*, trans. by Priscilla Throop (Rochester, VT: Healing Art Press, 1998), 142.

<sup>240</sup> *Symphonia*: “O Ecclesia”. This *sequentia* is to St. Ecclesia, a person, though, of course, it resonates with allusions to Holy Church.

Connection C: Allegories of Good Government Bad Government<sup>241</sup>



These frescos are two of a set of six by [Ambrogio Lorenzetti](http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?html/l/lorenzetti/ambrogio/governme/) in the Council Room of the Town Hall in Siena, Italy. Several of the frescos are purely allegorical, but these two are depictions of the benefits of good government. One is a view of the city, the other a view of the countryside. The city view shows safety in the streets, commerce, leisure activities, and fine buildings in good repair. The country view shows abundance, fertile fields, and safe journey.

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<sup>241</sup> Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Allegory of Good Government and Bad Government*, 1138-1340, Sala dei Nove, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena, Italy, 1138-1340, <http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?html/l/lorenzetti/ambrogio/governme/> (accessed Feb. 18, 2013).





The two frescos on this page show the effects of bad government. The city view shows danger in the city, crumbling buildings, and little commerce. The country view shows an infertile and devastated landscape, a burning village, soldiers approaching each other on the field of battle.

*Sermon 26: Sabbath before the Third Sunday of Lent  
The Prodigal Son*

Luke 15. 11–32 (Expo. Euang. 26, 27)

*A certain man*, in whose image and likeness humanity was created, *had two sons*, when he gave to humanity the knowledge of good and evil; *and the younger said*, who was more prone to do evil in instability of character<sup>242</sup>, *to his father*, to God: *Father, give me the portion of the property*, that is: allow me to fulfill my appetite for works, *that will belong to me*, when it touches me with regard to appetite for things of delight, *and he divided his property*, because to the one who adhered to the knowledge of good, he gave glory and honor, but the one who desires to be in the knowledge of evil, he allows to leave thus.

*And after not many days*, because where the days are not of well-being<sup>243</sup>, there is evil, *he gathered everything, the younger son departed abroad into a distant land*, that is: he withdrew<sup>244</sup> by himself, that he might fulfill his every wish, *and there he dissipated all his money*, clearly: he scattered his works in diverse vices, *living luxuriously*, when he shamelessly fulfilled all his wishes.

*And after he squandered everything*, that is: when he had done many evil things, so that now he considered them to be tedious, *a severe famine was experienced in that region*, he took no care for that which sustains life<sup>245</sup>, when he fulfilled his desires for evil, *and he began to be in want*, that is: he lost hope of life the overflowing of vice.

*And he departed*, withdrawing from God, *and attached himself to one of the citizens of that region*, when he joined himself to Malice, which had created a home for

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<sup>242</sup> *morum*: (gen. pl) character, morals, behavior. Kienzle: because of his unstable behavior.

<sup>243</sup> *salutis*: (gen. s) health; prosperity; good wish; greeting; salvation, safety. Kienzle: day of salvation

<sup>244</sup> *a seipso recessit*: or: he withdrew from his very self

<sup>245</sup> *ita ut de cibo uitae nullam curam haberet*: lit: so that he had no concern of the food of life, or he did not think to take responsibility for life's nourishment.

itself in his mind; *who sent him to his farm*, certainly: into the cultivation of sins, in which it settled itself, *so he might feed the swine*, that, by vice, he would nourish wickedness.

*And he would have wished to fill his belly*, clearly: his desires, *with the husks which the swine were eating*, clearly: with diverse vices, in this: he wished to blame God, Clearly: because he thought that God was more guilty of his sins<sup>246</sup> than he himself was, *and no one would give him any*, because nothing created assisted him, because he accused God to be guilty in this.

*Then he came to himself*, clearly: finally remembering his creator and the evils which he had done, because he had no hope in these, *he said*, reflecting inwardly: *How many hired laborers in my father's house*, clearly: who by their blood and many labors deserve celestial things, *have abundant bread*, clearly: fullness of justice<sup>247</sup>; *while I perish here of hunger*, in this that I am destitute of the appetite for good works. *I will rise*, from the evil path, *and go*, through the good path, *to my father*, who created me, *and say to him*, with a deep sigh<sup>248</sup> of lamentation<sup>249</sup>: *Father, I have sinned in heaven*, clearly: in the heavenly breath<sup>250</sup> which is in the soul, *and before you*, because I knew you to be God, although I have sinned; *I am no longer worthy to be called your son*, *make me as one of your hired hands*, clearly anyone who fulfilled your will by their blood and many labors.

*And rising*, from wickedness, *he went to his father*, in advancing of good ways, *However, when he was a long way off*, through wicked habit, *his own father saw him*, in searching, *and was moved by loving mercy*, because of the returning in love<sup>251</sup>, he was

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<sup>246</sup> *culpis*: Kienzle: failings.

<sup>247</sup> *iusticiae*: Kienzle: righteousness.

<sup>248</sup> *suspirio*: deep breath, sigh.

<sup>249</sup> *gemitus*: Kienzle: the sighing of a moan.

<sup>250</sup> *spiraculo*: lit.: air hole, vent, breathing passage. A particular word use in Hildegard (Kienzle).

<sup>251</sup> *ille in amore reuersionis ipsum tetigit*



touched. *And hastening*, through loving mercy, *he fell*, inclining himself, *upon his neck*, that is: in the conception of justice<sup>252</sup>, *and kissed him*, with the bond of charity.

*And his son said to him*, in penitence: *Father, I have sinned in heaven and against you*, because even when knowing you, I did not cease to sin, *I am no longer worthy*, because I am a transgressor, *to be called your son*, so that you may receive me into my former inheritance.” Here, however, he did not say anything about the hired workers, but expected only God’s grace.

*But the father said*, through heavenly inspiration, *to his servants*, clearly: the virtues, with which humans serve God: “*Quickly fetch my first*<sup>253</sup> *robe*, which the first human had lost in paradise, clearly: innocence, *and clothe him*, by the justice of innocence, *and give a ring on his hand*, clearly: the comprehension of good work, *and sandals on his feet*, though which he may renounce the devil, that he may walk uprightly. *And bring*, through invocation, *the fatted calf*, clearly: the Son of God, who brought heavenly abundance<sup>254</sup>, *and kill it*, repeat his martyrdom in this, *and let us eat*, appetite for good works, *and feast*, in rejoicing<sup>255</sup> together, because the greenness of the Holy Spirit has blossomed again in him, *because this my son*, whom I created, *was dead*, because he did not have the knowledge of God, *and is alive again*, returning to me; *he had been lost*<sup>256</sup>, in the memory<sup>257</sup> of justice, because he did not have life’s fullness<sup>258</sup>, *and is found*, in the way of justice.<sup>259</sup> *And they began* to feast in rejoicing together that the lost sheep had been found.

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<sup>252</sup> *in conceptione iusticiae*. Kienzle: with the purpose of justice.

<sup>253</sup> *primam*: first, best.

<sup>254</sup> *pinguedinem*: fat, fatness, oiliness, richness, fullness, exuberance. Kienzle: anointing.

<sup>255</sup> *congratulatione*: lit: to congratulate, to wish joy

<sup>256</sup> *perierat*: die, pass away, be ruined.

<sup>257</sup> *memoria*: or: remembering

<sup>258</sup> *saturitatem*: abundance

<sup>259</sup> Kienzle: on the path of righteousness.

*However, his older brother was in the field*, clearly: he who has good knowledge in the cultivation<sup>260</sup> of heavenly inheritance. *And when he came*, considering his ways, *and he drew near*,<sup>261</sup> through the good joining together<sup>262</sup>, to *his home*, that is: to the mansion of virtues, *he heard*, ascending to heaven, *music*, certainly: the joy of the heavenly vision, *and singing*, clearly: the beauty and glory in which God is served. *And he said*, through meditation, *to one of the servants*, certainly: Faith alone, *and asked*, through questioning, *what these things might be*, from the grace of God, that might encourage<sup>263</sup> him? *And he*, certainly: Faith, *said to him*, responding to his inner reflection: *Your brother*, in accordance with the recognition by which he knows God, *has come*, because he made an upright<sup>264</sup> journey, *and your father has killed the fatted calf*, that is: he by whom you were created; has repeated the passion of his Son who brought the abundance<sup>265</sup> of life, *because he received him safe*<sup>266</sup>, in good report, and embraced him.

*But he was indignant*, certainly he was amazed that God would have made so great of good from such great evil, *and refused* to enter<sup>267</sup> and receive his brother, because he did not have the repentance necessary for *joy* to be made over him just *as over one sinner*.

*The father, therefore, came out to him*, God sent an admonition to him, *and began to entreat him*, that he might remain in good. *Then he, replying*, in his ponderings, *said to his father*, to God: *Behold, all the years*, that is: by measure and moderation, *I serve you*, in good, *and never disobeyed your order*, by refusing that (order), like my brother;

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<sup>260</sup> *cultura*: cultivation, worship

<sup>261</sup> *et propinquaret*: Vulgate has *et appropinquaret*: Hildegard uses *propinquaret* in both sermons on this pericope. This does not change the sense of the text.

<sup>262</sup> Kienzle: alliance.

<sup>263</sup> *suscitasset*: encourage, stir up, awaken, kindle

<sup>264</sup> *rectum*: right, straight, honest, virtue

<sup>265</sup> *pinguedinem*: by reversing the choice of words within the phrase, Hildegard brings the two words *pinguedinem* and *saturitatem* together.

<sup>266</sup> *salvum*: saved, well, alive, unharmed, safe

<sup>267</sup> *intrare*. Vulgate: *introire*

*and never did you give me a kid*, clearly: he did not allow that on the part of sinners, *in order to feast with my friends*, clearly: with the virtues; that is: I might have such a report of my own good action, as this my brother about his conversion. *But after this son of yours*, who was created through you, *who devoured your wealth with prostitutes*, clearly: who, by neglecting your precepts, threw away those works which have been necessary for his own soul, and dissipated them with the mocking behavior of his folly, *he comes*, following the path of righteousness<sup>268</sup>, *you kill the fatted calf for him*, that is: you anoint him by the passion of your son in the abundance of life.

*But he himself*, certainly: God, *said to him* in admonition: *Son*, clearly: good knowledge, *you always*, in joy, *are with me*, and do not desert me, *and everything that is mine is yours*, clearly: you have all good things, because I am good. *Therefore it was right to feast*, in the congratulation of greenness of the Holy Spirit, *and to rejoice*, because wicked knowledge had been converted toward good. For it is necessary therefore that Wicked Knowledge return to good, when all good things of the father are praised and magnified in all creation. Just as a strong warrior, who overcomes his enemy, and afterwards, compelled by necessity, the enemy becomes his friend, because he will not be able to resist him, and therefore the conquered should be praised in his service. *Because your brother was dead*, in his wickedness, *is alive again*, in the knowledge of God and mindful of himself his origin<sup>269</sup>, *he was lost*<sup>270</sup>, by deceptive judgment<sup>271</sup>, *and is found*, in true light.

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<sup>268</sup> *rectum iter faciens*: lit.: doing the right journey. Kienzle: made an upright journey.

<sup>269</sup> *causa*: cause, reason; origin, source. Kienzle: circumstance.

<sup>270</sup> *perierat*: die, pass away; be ruined, be destroyed; go to waste (pluperfect)

<sup>271</sup> *in estimatione deceptionis*: lit.: in the valuation of deceit

## *Appendix 4*

### *Proposed Retreat for:*

#### *Viriditas: Reading in Retreat*

##### **A. Before the retreat**

I will be in touch with those who express interest to find out how their work intersects with spiritual care, what sparked their interest in the retreat, their knowledge of Hildegard and symbols, their experience with silence, with group confidentiality, and if they have ever had a retreat at a monastery before. That should give me an idea of whether or not this retreat is something I would encourage for them, or see if another setting would work better to support their spiritual life and work.

A couple of weeks before the retreat I will send a letter to the retreatants. The letter would go over the premise of the retreat, that taking time to engage with holistic symbols affirms healthy spirituality and can give tools to loosen the bonds of unhealthy spiritualities. It would give the schedule and a heads up on living at the periphery of an ongoing monastic community. The meaning of silence in this context will be covered. Included: the need to not bring distracting materials with them, the expectation that cell phones will be turned off (with assurance that necessary communication will be available), that communicating online and bringing work defeats the purpose of taking time for retreat. An invitation to bring art supplies and recreational equipment would be included, as well as a description of what supplies and opportunities would be available. I would invite them to get in touch with me if they had any questions or concerns, or with the monastery guest house if it was just a practical question.

## **B: Schedule for a Reading in Retreat offered at a monastery**

### *Day 1 (Evening)*

5PM Meet and Greet

5:30 Supper

6:30 Meeting to discuss the schedule, invitation into meaningful silence, house rules (including silence, monastic enclosure, locking doors, etc.), places where talking is allowed, places for recreation, the importance of being kind to oneself in the retreat context, opportunities for rest and recreation, invitation to monastic worship services, availability of chaplain and other spiritual care, confidentiality and trust, what to do in emergencies. Everyone needs to make a personal commitment to confidentiality and to respecting other's silence. Since this is deep work, deep emotions may surface. That is good; it means deep, important work is being done. If someone starts crying, do not touch them, talk to them, ask them questions, or interfere, even to offer Kleenex. Be a safe, silent, loving presence. Any questions?

7:30 break

8PM 1<sup>st</sup> Conference: Viriditas in nature

8:45 Compline

### *Day 2*

8AM breakfast (in silence)

9AM 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference: Viriditas in the Salvation Narrative (Sermon 26)

9:45 Personal reflection with opportunities for art, walking, labyrinth, or journaling.

10:30 Group reflection

11:15 Free time

12 noon Lunch (first part in silence, listening to reading; second part with conversations)

Free time

2:30 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference: Viriditas and virtues, healing sin and ariditas

3:15 Personal reflection with opportunities for art, walking, labyrinth, or journaling.

4PM Group reflection

4:45 Free time

5:30 Supper (conversations)

6:30 4<sup>th</sup> Conference: Viriditas binding the cosmos in mutuality

6:45 Personal reflection time

7:30 Group reflection

Free time until Compline

*Day 3*

8AM breakfast (in silence)

9AM Eucharist with homily: Viriditas and ecojustice

10:30 4<sup>th</sup> Conference: Viriditas as the fountain of grace

11:15 Reflection

12 noon Lunch (conversation)

1:30 PM Final gathering, for water ritual of gratitude

3PM departure

## **C: The Weekend Retreat Content**

The addresses are given in the reflective style of monastic conferences, presentations generally without immediate response or discussion. This setting, rather than lecture or seminar, invites the participants into personal reflection and meditation on the key themes presented. The conferences themselves also include works of other artists, composers, and poets that resonate with the themes of the addresses. By finding common resonances in these other works, the retreatants will be better able to bridge the perceived disconnect between Hildegard's context and ours.

Since the purpose of the retreat is to use the symbols as the main mode of teaching healthy spirituality, each conference will be centered in aesthetic theology. They will be experiential, starting with Hildegard's music, two illuminations present, large enough for everyone to gaze at while the conference is spoken. A bowl of herb-fragranced water, floating candles, a fountain, flowers, or other green plants would add to the sensory affirmation. The retreatant would be invited to handle fragrant herbs, crush, smell, and taste them.

The first conference is in the evening and is short, inviting the retreatants into the silence of night. The flow of the retreat needs to start with grounding. This grounding is done through the sensory affirmation of the aforementioned "props" and by a simple meditation of connecting retreatant's feet with the ground and thus to the material world, and their breath to the inbreathing and outbreathing of the others in the room, and to the inbreathing and outbreathing of the plants. The illuminations present would be of the

cosmos.<sup>272</sup> From there it is a simple task to connect with Hildegard's symbols and teachings of *viriditas* in nature, original blessing. Relationship is with the cosmos, created with spirit and materiality, expressing God's essential love.

The second conference, in the morning, would first reaffirm the sustaining presence of *viriditas*, with a repeat of the grounding meditation. Sermon 26<sup>273</sup> would propel us forward through the salvation history narrative. The two illuminations present are actually back-to-back in *Scivias*, the sapphire man and the six days of creation.<sup>274</sup> The emphasis of this conference would be humanity as beloved of God, and reason for trust. Relationship is with God who is love.

The third conference, in the afternoon, would center on the virtues: *viriditas* healing the individual soul, and the soul cooperating through cultivating virtues. The value of each soul is claimed, God reaching out in life-affirming love. In the flow of the retreat, this is the time for the deepest work. *Ariditas* would be the starting point, pointing to a journey towards wholeness. The illuminations are Fear of God and Soul and Body.<sup>275</sup> The symbol/virtue the Fear of God (awareness), found in both illuminations, full of eyes, is weird enough to "unbalance" the retreatant, give their psyche something meaty to work with. Relationship is God present in and working with the soul.

A relatively short evening conference would focus on *viriditas* as the author of compassionate presence, the author of mutuality in our relationships with other humans, as well as with other creatures. In the previous conference, one's own priceless value has

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<sup>272</sup> Appendix 1: A: Cosmic Egg *Scivias* I. 3; B: Caritas *BDW* I.

<sup>273</sup> The numbering of the Sermons follows Beverly Kienzle's.

<sup>274</sup> Appendix 1: C: Sapphire Human Form *Scivias*: II;2; D: Six days of creation *Scivias* II.1.

<sup>275</sup> Appendix 1: E: Fear of God *Scivias* I. 2; F: Body and Soul *Scivias* I.4.



been manifested; in the conference, that is revealed as the ground of our relationships with each other. The illuminations are of the Cosmic Wheel and Caritas.<sup>276</sup> Mutuality in *viriditas* is the basis for relationships.

A homily during Sunday morning Eucharist relates *viriditas* and justice, especially ecojustice. The various illuminations would be present, as well as water. The final conference centers on water, the fountain, which carries *viriditas*, grace. The illumination is of three virtues within the fountain.<sup>277</sup> The response to grace is thanksgiving and gratitude.

The group would break for a time of quiet reflection, art, or walking. Then the retreatants would reassemble. The theme of thanksgiving has brought the retreatants back up and out of the meditative mode; an activity that expresses gratitude gives them a chance to verbally and symbolically honor each other and their experience. We bless each other through a simple ceremony: a bowl of water, an evergreen branch, and words of thanksgiving.

Questions for Group Reflections:

Go over confidentiality rules, There are no wrong answers; there is only what the retreatant honestly experiences. All are invited to answer; none must.

1. Was there something that resonated for you? A symbol, a word, an idea that caught your attention? How did you feel? Did you have reservations about something? Did you feel resistance or anxiety? If so, how did you respond?

2. Do you find the symbol holistic/healing/affirming? How so? Or not?

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<sup>276</sup> Appendix 1: G: Cosmic Wheel, BDW IV; H Caritas Embracing Cosmos BDW II.

<sup>277</sup> Appendix 1: I : Caritas, Humilitas & Pax BDW III.3.

3. What did you do during the personal reflection time. Tell us about your experience.
4. When you think of the symbol now (eyes lowered or closed) what do you image, what do you feel?
5. (On the final conference) Which symbol resonates with your life as spiritual care giver? Which resonates with your role in your family? Which might resonate for someone you know? Which one evokes a spirit of gratitude in you?

#### **D: Evaluation and Follow-up**

Evaluation Forms will be emailed to participants after the retreat. That gives them a chance to make the transition back to their regular life *and* bring back to mind what they experienced in the retreat, reinforcing the connection.

#### *Evaluation of Viriditas: Reading in Retreat*

It is by evaluation that work improves. Please help me to evaluate the effectiveness of this retreat to teach and support holistic symbolic work by responding to the questions below. Feel free to answer only those questions which speak to you. While I would like to know your answer to everything, I do not wish to burden you with yet another task in your busy day. I will take your answers into consideration when planning future retreats.

1. Was the retreat what you expected? If so, what was helpful in identifying what you needed to know? If not, what more of different information would have been helpful?
2. What supported your retreat? What interfered?
3. Did you feel welcomed? What helped in becoming a retreat group? What did not?
4. What helped you to transition into retreat? Did you find the transition was within your realm of comfort? Was there anything that would have helped the transition?

5. Which conference or symbol comes to mind? Tell me about it.
6. How do you think what you experienced intersects with the needs and interests of those whom you counsel? Generally or with specific people?
7. Have you recognized an alienation or a holistic symbol since the retreat? Tell me about that encounter.
8. Did you find that the personal and group reflection times gave you what you needed? If so, what did you find helpful. If not, what interfered? Free time?
9. Did you feel safe, listened to, and invited into the retreat experience? Have you consciously brought that into your work and relationships? Perhaps what you were already doing reinforced?
10. How would you recognize that the symbolic work is in fact healing? That paradigms are shifting?
11. How did you experience the meals and times of silence?
12. Is there any practice that you have brought out of the retreat that you intend to incorporate into your life?

Because I believe symbolic work can help in soul-healing, I wish to facilitate conversation about this work. Let me know what you find works and how you know. Come to a refresher workshop or retreat and bring your insights with you to share. I have a newsletter so that I can stay in touch with you. That way we can learn more together about spiritual care. I will be putting your name on my newsletter email list. If you do not wish your name on the email list, please let me know and I will remove it. Thank you for your wisdom and engagement.

## **Appendix 5: I Kissed My Humanity Goodbye:**

### **How the Evangelical Purity Culture Dehumanizes Women<sup>278</sup>**

**By Elizabeth Esther with comments by Hannah Ettinger**

When I look at this picture of myself on my wedding day, I don't see a happy bride. I see a frightened little girl who was under incredible pressure from her family's ministry. Not only was I expected to be physically pure, I was expected to be emotionally pure. Emotional purity meant that I received approval from my father before I developed romantic feelings for a man.

In my fundamentalist church, we didn't date. We courted. We didn't really fall in love because FALLING in love was lack of self-control and failure to guard our hearts. Falling in love was for "worldly" people who didn't read their Bibles and pray for God's will. "Follow God's will and the feelings will follow," my fundamentalist father often told me. Following God's will meant getting prior approval before doing anything. And emotional purity meant getting prior approval before feeling anything. Essentially, church leadership told me how to feel.

My problem was that I developed romantic feelings for my husband before getting approval. It happened while traveling home from a summer missionary trip. I had the rare opportunity to talk with Matt alone. I'd only ever related to him in a group setting or at church. It was an exquisite experience of true, authentic connection (you'll get to

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<sup>278</sup> Elizabeth Esther, "I Kissed My Humanity Goodbye: How the evangelical purity Culture Dehumanizes Women," BlogHer Publishing Network, posted Jan 22, 2013, <http://www.elizabesther.com/2013/01/i-kissed-my-humanity-goodbye-how-the-evangelical-purity-culture-dehumanizes-women.html> (accessed Jan. 25, 2013); <http://wineandmarble.com> Hannah Ettinger. Used with permission.

read about it in my book) wherein we discovered we were kindred souls. A few days later, I blurted out that I liked him. He said he liked me, too but that we couldn't talk about it anymore until we received approval for courtship. During the year and a half we waited for courtship approval, I was expected to act (and feel!) like Matt meant nothing more to me than a casual friend. So, I shut down my emotions. This is a common experience for young women raised in the evangelical purity culture. For the sake of "emotional purity," we are taught to deny, repress, shame and shun our feelings.

Hannah of Wine and Marble shared her own experience with me:

*I was introduced to the idea of emotional purity, like most conservative Christian girls of my generation, from the opening pages of I Kissed Dating Goodbye, where Josh Harris told a story of a nightmare where someone's showing up at the altar to get married, but all their former "significant others" are holding onto this person and each claiming a "piece of [his/her] heart."*

*My mom and dad told me when I was very small (5? 6?) that while my friends might date, **we didn't date. We courted, because dating is practice for divorce.***

*And ever after that, they would quiz me to see if I had a crush, and I would pride myself on saying "no! that's bad!" When I was going through puberty, I **did** have crushes, and I confessed them in great agony to my mom, sure I was ruined to keep my heart for the one I'd eventually marry. Her response would always be a sober "well, lift that up to the Lord. Just give it up to him. You're too young to get married."*

*It was assumed that having a crush and not marrying them was committing emotional adultery before you were even married. And so I shut down my emotions. But I experienced misery and guilt any time my emotions "rebelled" and dwelled on someone "prematurely."*

As Hannah's experience illustrates, even schoolgirl crushes are blown up into massive moral failures described as 'committing emotional adultery.' This is dehumanizing because it shames a woman for experiencing normal, human feelings during normal, human development.

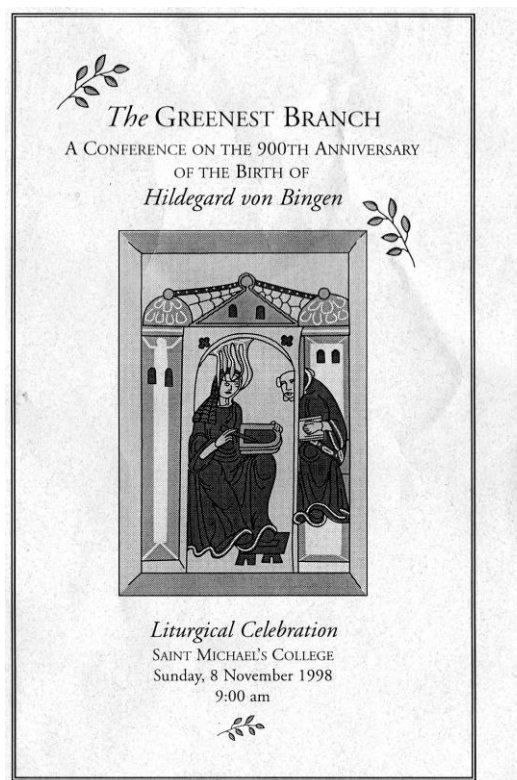
So, how do girls in strict, courtship environments cope? We shut down our emotions. The bad news is that you can't shut down one feeling without shutting down them all. I thought that by ignoring, denying, shaming and shunning my romantic feelings for Matt I was preserving my "emotional purity" and "guarding my heart." Instead, I ended up completely numb.


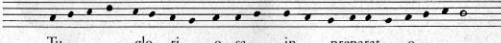

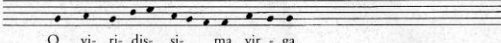


It got so bad that eventually I believed if something felt good it was probably sinful. If I was happy, I wasn't suffering enough. Sometimes I wished I were a robot so I could turn off my feelings with a push of a button. When we finally received courtship approval and it was OK for me to have romantic feelings for Matt, I was a mess. *I was depressed, exhausted, confused and literally sick all the time.*

My journals from age 18-20 describe my constant fatigue, exhaustion, confusion, depression and general malaise. I spent many days in bed just trying to recover from the constant stress of living inside this repressive environment. Purity culture took a literal toll on my body. Purity culture is horrifically exhausting. When spiritual authorities tell you how to feel, they are usurping your God-given autonomy and exercising a subtle form of spiritual abuse.

It is nothing short of a miracle that my husband and I are still together. What saved us? Getting OUT of that environment, leaving intense holiness behind, feeling our feelings. We found a way to remember those few moments of pure, authentic connection we once had and we've carefully built a new relationship together. Our recovery is still an ongoing process. But together, we are becoming human.

## Appendix 6: The Greenest Branch Liturgical Celebration Bulletin



 <p>GATHERING</p> <p>PROCESSIONAL</p> <p><i>O virtus sapientie</i></p> <p>WELCOME AND PRAYER</p> <p>PREPARATION FOR THE READINGS</p> <p><i>O pater omnipotens</i></p> <p>READINGS AND PSALMODY</p> <p>FIRST READING – Jane Ambrose <i>Judith 8:9-17</i></p> <p>PSALM <i>O viriditas digiti Dei</i></p>  <p>Tu glo- ri- o- sa in preparat - o -</p>  <p>(choir sings while congregation holds note) - o - ne De- i .</p> <p>SECOND READING – Vincent Pelletier <i>1 John 1:5-7; 2:7-13</i></p> <p>PSALM <i>O viridissima virga</i></p>  <p>O vi- ri- dis- si- ma vir - ga</p>	<p>REFLECTIVE READING – Ann Clarke Hildegard of Bingen, <i>Book of Divine Works</i>, III, 3.2</p> <p>WATER RITE</p> <p><i>O bonifaci Spiritus Sanctus</i></p>  <p>THE INTERCESSIONS</p> <p>LEADER: Lord, hear us CONGREGATION: Lord, graciously hear us</p> <p>THE LORD'S PRAYER</p> <p>THE BLESSING</p> <p>RECESSIONAL</p> <p><i>Cum processit factura</i></p>  <p>MINISTERS OF THE SERVICE</p> <p>LEADER - Shyla Foster READERS - Jane Ambrose, Vincent Pelletier REFLECTIVE READING - Ann Clarke Tanya Cimonetti, Jean-Marie Mellichamp and members of the Sacred Dance Ensemble</p> <p><i>Special appreciation to Anima</i></p>
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